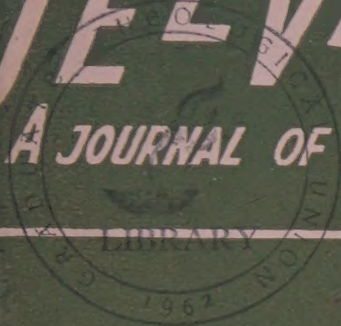


TEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION



SOME REASONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO MYSTICISM

Felix Podimattam

THE PRIMACY OF PRAYER AND PERSONAL FULFILMENT

Kurien Mathew

THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Vincent Kurisummootil

THE PETERSHAM MEETING

M. Basil Pennington

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JEEVADHARA

The Fullness of Life

**SOME REASONS
FOR THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER**

Editor:

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Editorial

The relevance of prayer is frequently questioned today. It is asked whether prayer is meaningful for busy persons. St. Paul exhorted us to pray "all the time on every possible occasion always and everywhere" ¹. Is this exhortation practicable in this bleeding world of ours? Is not the prayer of action more in keeping with our anthropological age than the prayer of solitude? At any rate, how many of us have the time and interest not to "get tired of staying awake to pray?" ². Has not prayer lost its meaning in our world of technology and involvement? Is it not absurd to try to convert the whole world into a sort of contemplative commune?

Why learn to commune with God? Why waste some time everyday in prayer? Learning to do certain things such as carpentry is easily understandable. A person can earn his living through carpentry. But what practical use is there in learning to pray? Many people do not pray and yet they seem to be getting on quite well in life. At the most, prayer could be an optional extra for those who have an inclination for it.

The temptation to view prayer as unnecessary is usual because prayer is not always enjoyable. We must be definite about the place of prayer in our life; else we will not have sufficient incentives to accept the discipline of prayer. We can never expect to persevere on the rugged way of prayer unless we are convinced that the effort is worth while. This issue of *Jeevadhara* purports to discuss some of the main reasons for the practice of prayer.

Prayer is to be distinguished from *prayers*. Prayers are ways and means of expressing the value of prayer. Their validity is to be reckoned from the inspiration they derive from the value of prayer. They are means to the goal of prayer. One can recite prayers without at the same time praying and one can pray without saying any prayers.

1. Eph 5: 19-20; 6: 18

2. Eph 6: 18

Prayer consists essentially in communion with God. Prayers are formulas which can help us to commune with God. What is essential is communion with God. A sigh can sometimes be the truest prayer. Many words may only poorly express what is contained in a sigh. On occasions, prayer can consist in a wordless look. There are not wanting moments of silent adoration which imply deep fellowship with God which may not be expressed in words. Some quick moments of joy are more binding than promises. Heart-rending cries to God are more substantial than praises learnt by heart.

We are here concerned with contemplative prayer or mysticism. It is a fact that the terminology "contemplation" or "mysticism" receives less and less appreciation in certain quarters although it has its attraction for some people. This is due to a misunderstanding. Some regard contemplation or mysticism as synonymous with monastic observance, and as a consequence it is relegated to the background as a remnant of bygone days or at least as something reserved for monks and nuns. For others contemplation or mysticism appears to suggest the idea of platonic intellectualism which consists in fleeing from reality into the world of abstract essences. Since many of our contemporaries find no charm in monastic observances or cold intellectualism they write off contemplation as out of keeping with their interests.

There is no need to stick to the term "contemplation" or "mysticism". What is needed is that we accept the reality implied in the word. This reality consists in gazing on the beauty of God³. It may be expressed in other terms such as interpersonal relationship with God, intersubjective communion with the Blessed Trinity abiding in us, the loving-knowing of God, immersion in the splendour of the Lord, tasting how sweet the Lord is. There are a hundred and one ways of expressing what is implied in the terms 'contemplation' 'mysticism', and hence terminology should cause no problem.

It is the prayer of the sectional editor that God may arouse deeper interest in intensive praying and that this issue of *Jeevadhara* may be an instrument in awakening many people to the only means of true fulfilment of themselves and of God's purposes in the world.

The Universal Call to Mysticism

A. The universality of the call to be emphasized

The word mysticism is strange to most Christians. Mystical life seems to be the preserve of saints and of a few select persons who have an interest and opportunity to busy themselves with spiritual realities. The generality of Christians appear to be doomed to a life of work and worry, involvement and distraction. They do not seem to be cut out for mystical prayer. Even if they were to try, they would not know how to go about it.

There are probably many priests and religious who think in the same way. This is understandable when we consider the training they received in prayer during the period of their formation. Most of them were trained to fulfil their obligation of prayer by reciting certain prayers such as the office, the rosary, by spending half an hour in meditation and by reciting a few ejaculations. They were told that they had done their duty if they were faithful to this prayer-schedule. One of the chief pre-occupations of those in charge of novitiates and seminaries seems to have been to train the candidates in this prayer routine and fidelity to it. Prayer beyond meditation was rarely proposed as something which was open and attainable to all with some good will and effort. The impression was generally given that mysticism remained beyond the reach of ordinary good priests and religious.

Many theologians have so over-emphasized the gratuitous aspect of mystical prayer that it appeared that we could do nothing to achieve it. No doubt, there is a continuous tradition of mysticism in Christianity but unfortunately sufficient attention was not given to its techniques, and to teaching it to the un-initiated.

It is a sad commentary on our spirituality that committed Christians feel the need to go beyond Christian tradition for experiencing mysticism. Mysticism never received the attention that was accorded to such subjects as theology, scripture, liturgy

and rubrics, and is, as a consequence, ill-prepared to meet the spiritual aspirations of our contemporaries. They are thus driven to turn to methods of prayer advocated by Eastern religions.

There are several reasons why the theologians were suspicious of the universal call to mysticism. In the first place, the rise of such aberrations as illuminism, intuitionism, subjectivism, quietism and false mysticism caused suspicion. The effect of mystical union was the second reason. Mystical union implies a certain kind of merging of the soul with God. This seemed to threaten the Western concept of the individual with its great stress on independence.

Thirdly, direct access to God that is implied in mysticism appeared to minimize the importance of the mediation of Christ. There is a great similarity among the mystical experiences of different religions. If mystical experience is equally salvific outside the Christian dispensation, Christ would not be the sole door through which all must pass to have access to the Father. Understandably this caused alarm, to the detriment of true mysticism.

Finally, the controversy between Bossuet and Fenelon in the 17th century did harm to the cause of mysticism. Bossuet's 'victory' made contemplative prayer and mysticism less attractive. A universal sense of horror of quietism prevailed everywhere. Contemplation and mysticism were easily identified with quietism.

B. The meaning of mysticism

Mysticism is not a luxury for Christians; it is a necessity. It is unfortunate that the term mysticism is often mistaken for extraordinary phenomena such as visions, ecstasies, transports of joy, etc. When we say that all Christians are called to mysticism we are not thinking of these phenomena. Christian mystics have unanimously regarded extraordinary manifestations as unnecessary for the highest form of prayer. Mysticism essentially consists in a growing awareness of one's loving communion with the indwelling Blessed Trinity.

Mysticism may be defined as the type of prayer that is mainly passive, the principal agent in it being God who is infusing faith, hope, charity, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit into

the heart of a human person in a more than ordinary degree, the secondary agent being a man who opens his heart to receive God's gift.¹

This definition needs to be qualified immediately. Prayer here does not mean necessarily the time set apart for formal contemplation but prayer inside or outside the chapel, formal or informal. This prayer may be present very intensely during the time set apart for contemplation, but it may also be spread over all the day penetrating our thoughts and actions in every way, although in a less intense way. This prayer is mainly passive. The degree of passivity may vary according to the intensity of God's action, our response to it, the work we are doing, and according to many other factors; but in order to be mysticism the element of passivity should be at least predominant. In this prayer it is the Holy Spirit who is infusing faith, hope and charity into the heart of a human being because all progress in mysticism consists in the increase of the theological virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The three virtues are really given to every Christian at the time of his baptism, but in mysticism they attain a more than ordinary intensity and acquire a perfection that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Obviously such a holy and sanctifying action has to come from God; no man can give it to himself. But man has the power to refuse the gift of God or to neglect it, as he has the power to open his heart to the action of God and let Him do there what He pleases.²

A distinction is necessary between ordinary and extraordinary mysticism. Ordinary mysticism is the *mysticism of life* while extraordinary mysticism is the *mysticism of prayer*.

At the beginning of the spiritual life grace functions in a hidden way. Apparently the initiative is more ours than God's. But as we grow in our spiritual life, the gifts of the Holy Spirit take ascendancy over the virtues and we pass on to the mystical life. When the activity of the gifts is habitually and manifestly dominant in our life there is no doubt that we are in the mys-

1. Ladislav Ory "Contemplation - Some Practical Considerations", *Review for Religious*, 24 (1965) p. 248

2. *Ibid.*, p. 249

tical way of life. Mystics of life live under the habitual guidance chiefly of the five active gifts of the Holy Spirit; while in the mystics of prayer the other two contemplative gifts are habitually predominant.

According to Jacques Martain, mystical graces are twofold: they may be predominantly contemplative life. This happens when wisdom and understanding are the ruling gifts. Or they are chiefly active, found in active life and realizing union with God in the very action, as is the case when the other gifts take the lead.³

Ordinary mysticism is nothing else than living in God's presence. It can be compared to breathing. We inhale and exhale air and we are in constant contact with the atmosphere around us. Yet we are not always explicitly conscious of it. Ordinary mysticism is similar to this. It consists in loving and continual contact with God such that we are not explicitly aware of Him most of the time.

The example of a child playing in the courtyard when his mother is looking on, will give a clearer idea of ordinary mysticism. When the child plays he is engrossed in his toys; he builds a castle with his blocks. All the while he is aware of his mother's presence, though not explicitly so. When the mother leaves the place, the child immediately misses something, namely, the atmosphere of love and trust with which he was surrounded all this time. Something similar happens in ordinary mystical prayer. God is always present to us supplying an atmosphere of love and trust. Although we are engrossed in our work we feel that God is there and that we are not alone.

When we practise this kind of prayer life is full of opportunities for it. God is in the entire world and the whole of creation reminds us of Him. The sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the scenery, the flowers, the sky, the animals, the highways, the factories, the traffic, in short, everything speaks to us of God. Those who practice this kind of prayer have the ear to hear God

3. Jacques Maritain, "Une question sur la vie mystique et la contemplation", *Vie Spirituelle*, 7 (1922) pp. 636-650

speaking through all the events of life. They are happy and have known the secret of true peace and joy. God communicates life to them at every moment. They are alive to the reality of God's communication in every circumstance of their life and their main concern is to do the will of their Father in heaven. They literally walk with God because He is always with them.

Mysticism of life finds God and communes with Him in everyday activity. It is being Christ-like in every facet of our life. It is orientating our life in the direction of God's will. It is to act like Christ in every incident of our life— while we play, while we eat, while we are sick, while we recreate, while we die and so on. Mysticism of life connotes total harmony between our faith and our life.

Extraordinary mysticism, or mysticism of prayer, is wordless, silent, supra-conceptual prayer, transcending ordinary discursive reasoning to such an extent that it may be called super-thinking. Bringing with it ineffable wisdom it is silent rest in a Supreme Being with whose presence the person is filled like the sponge with the surrounding sea, a Supreme Being who dwells like a king at the centre of the interior castle⁴.

All are called to the mysticism of life though not all are called to the mysticism of prayer. The spiritual life normally leads to mystical life though not to mystical prayer. Most of us are not cut out to be mystics of prayer. Our natural dispositions and temperaments and a multiplicity of other circumstances do not create the milieu for extraordinary mysticism.

C. Why is mysticism for all ?

A school of spiritual theology has maintained that mysticism is a pure gift of God which He grants to whomever He wills. Mysticism is styled as a special grace that is beyond ordinary human psychology and effort. This view is untenable for a variety of reasons.

4. W. Johnston, "Mystical Prayer – Can it be Taught?" *Review of Religious*, 28 (1969) p. 760

1) Neither Scripture nor any important document of the Church supports the view that mysticism is a special gift of God. Perfection of prayer is not the monopoly of any group among the people of God. It is the privilege of everybody including those who take to temporal occupations. Any opinion that limits the perfection of the spiritual life to a select few is automatically suspect because it overlooks the basic Christian message that all are called to be perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect. Everyone, especially the poor, has a place in the salvation offered by Christ. Baptism unites every Christian to Jesus Christ and gives him a share in his life. He is grafted as a branch to the vine that is Christ. Even if we were to prescind from this basic Christian teaching, the fact remains that prayer and growth in it are constitutive elements of human life. All religions give testimony to this.

It is a presupposition of the Holy Scripture that the highest union with God is open to all men. There is no hint anywhere that constant prayer and hunger for God or profound experience of Him is the prerogative of a few Christians.

2) The command of Christ to pray always is directed to everyone, and therefore praying always should be possible for everybody. God usually does not demand extraordinary things from ordinary people nor does He demand the impossible from anybody. Hence prayer cannot be so difficult as to be outside the reach of anyone.

Some of the saints and the blessed and very many persons noted for their prayer life were ordinary people like us living an ordinary life. St. Frances of Rome became a saint by fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother. We have a twice married and widowed woman in Blessed Maria Mancini, a queen in St. Elizabeth, a beggar in St. Benedict Joseph Labre, a farm-labourer with a difficult wife in blessed Albert of Bergamo and a dock-worker in Mathew Talbot.

Thomas Dubay adds a few more reasons for the universal call to mysticism⁵.

5. Thomas Dubay, *Pilgrims Pray*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 107-113

3) The great commandment when taken without dilution also supposes a complete communion for all. If we are to love the Lord with our *whole* heart, soul, mind and strength, we have a goal to achieve in which nothing in a person is left unsaturated with love. Even one's thoughts are immersed in love. Would anyone seriously hold that this completeness of love could be anything extraordinary? Would anyone hold that the greatest commandment envisions a lesser love? Can whole be less than whole?

4) Receptivity is normal in Christian life. Every good and perfect gift descends from the Father of lights⁶. "What do you have that was not given to you?" asks Paul⁷. These general statements of receptivity on our part are supplemented by specific details. We receive knowledge, light and truth from God indwelling⁸. The Holy Spirit of love is given to us and the love of Christ impels us⁹. Even our decisions and their execution are provided by God working within¹⁰. If all this receptivity is ordinary, it would follow that a high degree of it is also ordinary. God does not operate with quasi-mathematical cut-off points. This conclusion seems inescapable when we recall that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father and that we have nothing that is not given to us. The loftiest type of receptivity, the mystical, is part of an ordinary and still larger plan.

5) The degree of purification required for closeness to the Holy One cannot be adequately effected by us even with our best efforts. According to Scripture our purification is to be entire. We are to be holy and spotless and to live through love in the presence of the Father¹¹. We are to try to be as pure as Christ Himself, to be holy, just as He is holy¹². While we are to work actively toward achieving this spotlessness, there is a purification that we cannot achieve by ourselves. As gold is tested and purified in the fire, so are we to be purified by the Lord who is to come¹³. Jesus uses the image of pruning: the person who is growing is pruned so that he may bear more fruit¹⁴.

6. *James* 1; 17

8. *Jn* 14:21, 26

10. *Phil* 2:13

12. *1 Jn* 3;3, 7

14. *Jn* 15:2

7. *1 Cor* 4:7

9. *Rom* 5:5; *2 Cor* 5:14

11. *Eph* 1:4

13. *Mal* 3:2-3

Experience too, indicates the necessity of passive purification. Who does not eventually discover his own inability to be rid of a multitude of defects despite all good intentions? Who would not admit that often he does not even realize the existence of these defects? Who does not recognize in himself the deficiencies cited by St. John of the Cross: irritation over small matters, unreasonable desire to be esteemed, impatience with one's own imperfections, condemning others in one's heart, slight traces of worldliness, excessive desire to experience pleasure in spiritual exercises, merely natural friendships, voracious spiritual reading? It is John's thought that we cannot be rid of these and other like defects simply by our own efforts. There is need to be drawn into the dark night of passive purification. The conclusion is this: if we are to become holy and spotless, mysticism by which this is achieved must be available to all who are called to be holy and spotless. And that means everyone.

6) The "new creation" effected in us by the grace of Christ is tailored to the attainment of the Blessed Trinity in profound intimacy. Just as the eye clamours for light and colour as the objects for which it was made, so grace clamours for the inner life of the Father, Son and Spirit as the object of its own being. There is nothing in the indwelling mystery that is extraordinary in our economy of salvation. Neither the divine self-communication through knowledge, love and joy nor man's receptivity is to be considered out of the usual path of the life in Christ. We would have to add, too, that grace would be a truncated power if it were not made for full achievement of its object. Hence, to postulate two ways to full holiness seems to suggest that the new creation of sanctifying grace is not sufficient for the complete attainment of purification and positive holiness, at least not sufficient for some persons.

7) Then too, the whole tradition up to about the 17th century took it for granted that a deep communion with God is open to all. In the patristic literature nowhere is there the impression that certain types of lofty prayer are out of the ordinary path, that only the *elite* can hope to achieve a profound communion with the Lord. On the contrary, it is taken as obvious that all of Scripture is written for all men and women; that the

experience of God, continual prayer, ardent longing for Him, deep immersion in Him, are open to all conditions of life.

8) This, too, has been, and continues to be, the teaching of the official magisterium of the Church. Laymen as well as priests and religious have been praying for years in the liturgy on St. Theresa's day that they should be fed with her heavenly doctrine and Theresa is known, of course, chiefly for her writing on mysticism. For years we have all likewise prayed on the feast-day of St. John of the Cross that we should imitate him always - and John is known especially for his incomparable descriptions of the loftiest contemplation open to the human person.

In several documents Vatican II proposes the deepest prayer life as normal for everyone. The Constitution on the Church remarks that the priest's activities are to be fed from "an abundance of contemplation".¹⁵ An abundance of contemplation cannot mean an inferior degree of it, unless one is thinking of a mere quantity of time spent, thus for one does not abound in some gift or quality unless one has a fulness of it. And if this is true of priests, all priests, it is true of laymen also, for no theologian makes distinctions regarding growth in prayer among classes in the people of God. There are other bases for distinctions among states of life, but prayer depth is not one of them. Another document, the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, speaks of working religious as "thoroughly imbued with the treasures of mysticism".¹⁶ One is not thoroughly imbued with anything unless one possesses it to fulness. It would be difficult to imagine a more strong, a more clear statement to indicate that all religious, not merely cloistered ones, are invited to the loftiest mysticism. Once again it must be concluded that if this is true of working religious, it is true of all working people.

This conclusion is borne out by explicit statements of the same Council as it speaks of lay people. Discussing our growth in understanding divine realities, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation uses mystical language in describing how all

15. no. 41

16. no. 18

of us develop in grasping revelation. It speaks of the contemplation of believers who experience spiritual things in their hearts. This experience of God in prayer is assumed as normal for anyone.¹⁷ Similarly the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy assumes that deep prayer is found among all classes of persons within the liturgical celebration. We find that the "the faithful" *taste* to the full of the paschal mysteries.¹⁸ The expression seems to be borrowed from Psalm 34, "taste and see how good the Lord is", a Hebrew way of saying, "experience God". The Council assumes that this experience is to be "full" for each and everyone. Again, it would be difficult to express more forcefully and briefly than in this way that the very heights of advanced prayer are open to anyone in the celebration of the Eucharist. In the next sentence we likewise read that this Sacrament sets the faithful afire. Can one imagine a stronger image than fire to speak of advanced love? Indeed, it is difficult to see how one could subscribe to the two-way theory after Vatican Council II.

The reflection of the Church in India has fully endorsed this rediscovery of tradition, in a series of International, national, regional and local seminars and conferences, beginning with the All-India Seminar on the Church in India today and its preparatory seminars (1968-69), and including the International Theological Conference of Nagpur (1971), the National Consultation on Evangelization (Patna 1973), the Asian Monastic Meeting (Bangalore 1973), the General Meeting of the CBCI (Calcutta 1974) and the General Meeting of the Major Superiors of the CRI (Bangalore (1974)).¹⁹

9) The two-way theory did not seem even to occur to the great mystic theologians of the past: Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard. Through the centuries we find the assumption which occurs also in Scripture that there is one essential path to holiness that all men follow, one evolution of growth normal for everyone, one development of prayer from the first babblings to profound communion, open to any person

17. no. 8

18. no. 10

19. D. S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Praying Seminar*, Bangalore, 1976, p. 95

willing to pay the price, namely, to say an entire 'yes' to God. We shall draw on the scholarly study of Cuthbert Butler for the opinions of some of the Fathers on this topic.²⁰

St. Augustine, in more than one place, describes contemplative life in practice, as it may be lived in this world. After saying that the act of contemplation is the highest act of the soul, he goes on to say that certain choice souls who have been admitted to it, have in some measure described its joys. He continues: "I now dare to aver that if we steadfastly hold to the course that God commands us to, and we have undertaken to hold to, we shall come by the power and wisdom of God to the First Cause, or First Principle of all things; which when we have intellectually seen it, we shall truly see the vanity of all things under the sun".²¹

Contemplation in this life is here promised to those who faithfully pursue the way laid down by God for attaining it. This teaching is illustrated by other passages, such as the following, which is of value also to set off against the apparent pervading intellectualism of St. Augustine's accounts of contemplation; it shows that, to his mind, those who arrive there are not the 'intellectuals' but the 'little ones' who follow the path of Christ crucified: "If we do not abandon it, we shall without doubt arrive, at not merely so great an understanding of things incorporeal and unchangeable as cannot in this life be grasped by all, to the height of contemplation, which the Apostle calls 'face to face'".²²

But he recognizes that the hermits, such as those of Egypt, have unique advantages for the pursuit of contemplation: "They enjoy converse with God, to whom with pure minds they inhere, and are most blessed in the contemplation of His beauty, which cannot be perceived save by the intellect of the holy".²³

20. C. Butler, *Western Mysticism*, London, 1927, pp. 240-287

21. *Ibid.*, p. 241

22. *Ibid.*, p. 242

23. *Ibid.*

That St. Gregory believed contemplation not to be the prerogative of any small select spiritual circles, but open to all sincere persons who live a good Christian life, appears from the circumstance that his principal expositions of contemplative life were given, not in conferences to his monks, but in public sermons preached in the Lateran Basilica to mixed congregations of all comers, e. g., the two Homilies on Ezechiel, 2 : 2 and 2 : 5. At the close of the former he says: "See, beloved brethren, while wishing to explain to you the theory of each life, we have spoken at undue length. But good minds, who love to carry out both of these two lives should not find it burdensome to hear about them". This shows he thought a considerable number of hearers were likely to be concerned with the contemplative life.²⁴

Similarly at the close of the other homily he quite definitely declares that contemplation may be the lot of all, no state or condition of life being debarred: "It is not the case that the grace of contemplation is given to the highest and not given to the lowest; but often the highest, and often the most lowly, and very often those who have renounced, and sometimes also those who are married, receive it. If therefore there is no state of life of the faithful, from which the grace of contemplation can be excluded, anyone who keeps his heart within him may also be illumined by the light of contemplation; so that no one can glory in this grace as if it were singular. It is not the high and preeminent members of holy Church only that have the grace of contemplation; but very often those members receive this gift, who, although by desire they already mount to the heights, are still occupying low positions. Almighty God impours the light of contemplation into those who appear to be lowly in the eyes of men, but secretly give themselves up to the pursuit of divine wisdom, pant after heavenly things, and think on the everlasting joys".²⁵

Elsewhere are found such utterances as the following: "We see daily in holy Church that very many, while they manage well external things that come to them, are by the grace given

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271

them led moreover to mystic intelligence; so that they faithfully administer outward things and are gifted greatly with inward understanding".²⁶

On this point St. Bernard's testimony is less clear than St. Augustine's and St. Gregory's, because in what he says of contemplation he is addressing his monks. He certainly encourages them all to aspire to contemplation and declares it to be open to any of them who strives in the right way to attain it. But in some passages he may be understood as speaking, more generally, of all devout Christians. For instance: "My beloved is mine, and I am His". It is the Church that speaks thus. But what shall we say of each of us individually? Are we to think that there is any one among us to whom what is said by the Bride is capable of being applied? Anyone, do I say, among us? I should think that there is no one at all among the faithful members of the Church with respect to whom it may not just be inquired whether the Bride's mystical saying is not realized in some degree in him".²⁷

It is a fact beyond doubt that mysticism was never limited to the confines of contemplative orders and mystical theologians. It was considered to be the culmination of a serious life of prayer, sacrifice and love available to all the members of the Church including those who come "at the eleventh hour". Any person who is prepared to surrender his heart and life to Christ is worthy of mystical experience. It is the patrimony of the Mary Magdalenes as much as of the St. Johns, of the prodigal sons as much as of the faithful servants.

10) Mystical graces have always been experienced even by lay people. They have been the portion of many humble and devout persons throughout history. They formed part of their very Christian existence although few had the talent and learning to articulate their experiences.

The Charismatic Renewal of recent times is a proof for the fact that mysticism is not so rare as we might think. Seeing,

26. *Ibid.*, p. 271

27. *Ibid.*, p. 287

as we do, the renewal of the Christian life in those who have been touched by the Charismatic Renewal we are moved to give glory to God. We see in individual Christians a new and wonderful ardour showing itself, a spiritual warmth, a yearning to know Christ more fully, a longing that He should fill other hearts and minds and lives. We see in them an urgency to tell others what has happened, how Jesus has come to them in a very special way and has lifted them up, how He has come alive for them a vibrant and palpable peace. These happy people will tell us how wondrously He comes and then how mysteriously He seems to go away and leave them with a feeling of great loss. They will also strongly bear witness to the fact, that for them life can never be the same again but will be ever more beautiful, now charged with a new meaning and a new openness to growth in the Christian life. We will hear how the sacraments have a new value for them, how every word of the Mass searches the corners of their hearts, how in marriage their hearts are awakened to a new experience of love and God's presence, how every person they meet now is lovable, and how they recognize—as by a new knowledge—the presence of the Holy Spirit. We will also see them, young and old, reading the Scriptures hungrily and praying, 'without ceasing', seeking in the sacred writings the testimony of things they have themselves experienced. What we are noticing, and what was always true, is that many lay people, who may not know the meaning of the word, are contemplatives and mystics, and sanctify their lives gloriously, making of the street a cloister open to the full view of the world. Such Christians indeed put mysticism on the roads of the world and bear witness in a very powerful way to the living presence of Jesus.²⁸

It is gratifying to note that as a consequence of the universal call to mysticism many Christians strive for and actually attain, contemplative prayer. They are an eloquent proof of the fact that mysticism can be found not only in the cloisters but also in families, industrial houses, among farm-workers, officials, intellectuals, artists, professors and students.

28. Cormac O'Connor, "Contemplation and Charismatic Renewal", *Doctrine and Life*, 26 (1976) pp. 704-706

11) True, only three of the Apostles were chosen to witness the Transfiguration but they were types of every kind of human being. They were noted neither for intellectual brilliance nor for remarkable sanctity. They were ordinary men who were docile to the activity of the Holy Spirit and who permitted themselves to be led to mystic insight. This is another proof that mystical graces are open to all those who are willing to strengthen their faith and to be guided by the Spirit. The opinion that mystical experience is meant for a few specialists living in rare circumstances does not find support in the Transfiguration model of prayer.

12) According to St. John of the Cross, the Mystical Doctor of the Church, mysticism is normal in the development of the life of grace and virtues. This is the conclusion which the Carmelite Father Michael of the Holy Family arrives at in a well-thought out study²⁹. He argues in the following way.

The mystical doctrine of St. John of the Cross is meant not only for a few contemplative souls but for all as is clear from his writings, particularly from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. He tells us in this work that he wants to treat of the "manner of arriving at the heights of the mountain which is the high state of perfection which we call union of the soul with God". He then goes on to enumerate the different phases of the journey up the mountain of perfection and concludes: "Of all these, with the Divine favour, we shall endeavour to say something, so that each soul who reads this may be able to see something of the road that he ought to follow, if he aspires to attain to the summit of this Mount". He concedes that the matter he will treat of is lofty and obscure, but he declares that it contains "solid and substantial instruction, as well suited to one kind of person as to another if they desire to pass to the detachment of spirits which is here treated".

It is true, he declares in the last paragraph of the Prologue of the *Ascent*, that his "principal intent was not to address all, but rather certain persons of our sacred Order of Mount Carmel of the primitive observance, both friars and nuns - since they

29. Michael of the Holy Family, "The Normalcy of Contemplation", *Spiritual Life*, 2 (1956) pp. 245-253

have desired me to do so—to whom God is granting the favour of setting them on the road to this Mount". But he wrote for them, first, because they asked him to write about such matters, and secondly, because they better understood the doctrine of 'poverty of spirit'. It is to be remembered, too, that he did not prepare this work for publication, but intended it to be a practical solution to the problems of those for whom he wrote it. But from the quotations we have given from the Prologue and from statements that are constantly recurring, it is beyond doubt that he felt that his doctrine was of value to all.

St. John of the Cross regards the passive purifications of sense and spirit as necessary for the attainment of union. This simply means that mystical experience is necessary to attain union, since the passive purifications are caused by mystical graces. Speaking of the passive nights he writes: "This night, which as we say, is contemplation, produces in spiritual persons two kinds of darkness or purgation, corresponding to the two parts of man's nature—namely, the sensual and the spiritual."³⁰ Elsewhere in the same book he tells us: "This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural, and spiritual, and which is called by contemplatives infused contemplation, or mystical theology."³¹

In the first six chapters of the *Dark Night*, St. John speaks of the imperfections of beginners. He speaks of their spiritual pride and presumption, of their spiritual avarice, luxury, gluttony, envy, and sloth. Beginners must rid themselves of such imperfections if they wish to enter the state of proficients. The Saint tells us that the passive night of the senses rids the soul of these imperfections. "And it will also be seen", he writes, "how many blessings the dark night of which we shall afterwards treat brings with it, since it cleanses the soul and purifies it from all these imperfections"³².

St. John goes on to describe when the passive night of the senses begins: "Into this dark night souls begin to enter when

30. *The Dark Night of the Soul*, I, viii, 1

31. *Ibid.*, II, v, 1

32. *Idid.*, I, i, 3

God draws them forth from the state of beginners - which is the state of those that practice meditation - and begins to set them in the state of progressives - which is that of those who are already contemplatives - to the end that, after passing through it, they may arrive at the state of the perfect, which is that of the Divine union of the soul with God"³³.

Some might say that the soul could be purified of its defects by other ascetic practices; thus they would deny the necessity of the passive purification of sense, which God works in the soul by means of infused contemplation. St. John of the Cross recognizes no other means of purification than the passive night of sense. "But neither from these imperfections", he writes, "nor from those others can the soul be perfectly purified until God brings it into the passive purgation of that dark night whereof we shall speak presently.... Because however greatly the soul itself labours, it cannot actively purify itself so as to be in the least degree prepared for the Divine union of perfection of love, if God takes not its hand and purges it in that dark fire".³⁴ The soul actively seeks to purify itself by the practices of the ascetic life. However, by these practices it cannot "in the least degree" prepare itself for Divine union. God must bring it into the passive night of sense.

While speaking of the dark night of the spirit, St. John makes it clear that this night, which directly precedes union of the soul with God, is a necessary part of the soul's spiritual journey. Just as the senses must be purified by the passive night of sense, so the spirit must be purified by the passive night of the spirit. Without this night the purification of the soul could not be completed.

The Saint describes the imperfections of the proficient. We are told that some are habitual, others actual. "The habitual imperfections are the imperfect habits and affections which have remained all the time in the spirit, and are like roots, to which the purgation of sense has been unable to penetrate".³⁵ The actual imperfections are many and varied, and all are not liable

33. *Ibid.*, I, i, 1

34. *Ibid.*, I, iii, 3

35. *Ibid.*, II, ii, 1

to them in the same way. At times the soul may believe in vain visions; it may become proud and presumptuous; "it may become bold with God, and lose holy fear, which is the key and the custodian of all the virtues".³⁶

St. John feels that such imperfections are found to some extent in all proficient. He knows but one means by which they can be eradicated – the passive night of the spirit. It is only through the purgations of this "night" that the very roots of imperfections are got rid of. "None of these proficient", he writes, "however greatly he may have exerted himself, is free, at best, from many of those natural affections and imperfect habits, the purification whereof we said is necessary if a soul is to pass to Divine union."³⁷ St. John of the Cross recognizes no other means of completely eradicating the imperfections of the soul than the passive night of the spirit. Without the passive purification of the spirit these defects remain in the soul. Consequently without the passive purification of the spirit there can be no sanctity. It follows then that mysticism is normal in the development of life of grace and virtues.

D. Answer to objections against the universal call

At the beginning of this century some authors questioned the universality of the call to mysticism. According to them there are two distinct ways of prayer, one being active, ascetic and ordinary; the other being passive, mystical and extraordinary. The first way of prayer is the result of the ordinary grace of God and human effort, the second, that of extraordinary grace which among other things purifies the soul and infuses into it light and love. The first way is open to all, while the second is reserved for a select few.

The main argument in support of this theory is the fact that only a few persons ever manage to achieve mysticism. How could God call all to mystical experience and only so few actually reach it? The explanation that it is due to some fault on the part of man is too harsh a position to accept.

36. *Ibid.*, II, ii, 3

37. *Ibid.*, II, iii, 4

This argument does not substantiate the two-way theory. It is noteworthy that this argument does not wrestle with the basic theological data of the Indwelling Presence, the new creation by grace, the receptivity of man before God. The point of the argument is not unlike a man's concluding that it is not normal for acorns to become full oaks because as a matter of fact few acorns do become oaks. The argument loses sight of the fact that in matters of living development, impediments, obstacles, wrongs do not erase what ought to be. The fact that most people deliberately commit sins by no means indicates the normalcy of sin. That few people love all their neighbours warmly does not imply that gospel norms are unreal.³⁸

A certain author lists two reasons why some theologians came to speak of "infused contemplation" as something poured in directly by God³⁹. In the first place this way of speaking is inherited from the Bible. For the Hebrew everything was the work of Yahweh. If the rain fell, this was the action of Yahweh; if someone died Yahweh took his life; if someone went astray, Yahweh hardened his heart and so on. This was all the more stressed in the communication of God to man: the great experiences of Abraham. Moses and Paul had nothing whatever to do with their own efforts, asceticism and prayer. All was the gift of Yahweh. And no doubt this influenced the Christian tradition and made it speak of mysticism as the work of God alone. In the realm of natural science, the direct action of God was "demythologized" so that we have come to recognize secondary causes that the Hebrew did not think about; but in the realm of psychology and mysticism the demythologizing has yet to be done.

But there is yet another reason for this stress on God's action which is a psychological one. It is well known that mystical graces descend upon people when they least expect them. A person goes all prepared to his prie-dieu, only to find that nothing happens; but when he picks up a spade to work in the garden, the thing descends on him with the greatest force. This perhaps

38. Thomas Dubay, *Pilgrims Pray*, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109

39. W. Johnston, "Zen and Christian Contemplation", *Review of Religious*, 29 (1970) p. 702

led to the conclusion that mystical graces are completely outside human control, pure gifts that God gives when He wants, and to whom He wants, in accordance with His free decision. But our modern knowledge of the mind and its unconscious sectors must make us wary of such simple explanations. Unknown sectors of the psyche can all too easily play these tricks. All this makes us think more about secondary causes in mystical prayer and about a healthy demythologization of spiritual theology. There is no doubt that Christian mysticism, at least in its early stages, is simply the outcome of an intense love that unifies the personality and leads to a total detachment in a great silence. If this is so, it can be explained as an ordinary psychological process without recourse to any special interventions of God – although, of course, ordinary grace is necessary for this, as for any prayer.

The demands of God are radical. We are often lax and half-hearted. We easily write off mysticism for the hermits and the anchorites. The Good News is addressed to all, to the married as well as to the unmarried. Holy Writ is strikingly democratic when it comes to communion with God. Vatican II echoes the same message. It admonishes all men to practise continual prayer: "The Christian is assuredly called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father in secret; indeed according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, he should pray without ceasing".⁴⁰ St. Thomas More, a married saint, was at prayer from two to six o'clock in the morning. There are not a few lay and religious people who translate into their lives the Biblical injunction to pray always thus proving that Scripture is wholly practicable.

The universality of the call to mystical experience can be said to be the authentic teaching of Christian tradition. Time and again in history this doctrine went insufficiently recognized although it was never completely lost sight of. Vatican II has reinstated this doctrine to its pristine position and in this it was aided by the modern biblical and theological revival. It is high time that this teaching descend from the doctrinal level to the pastoral level of living so that more and more people become convinced of their call to mystical graces.

40. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 12

In conclusion we can state that it is the teaching of Scripture and of the *magisterium* that all men are invited to a deep communion with God. Mysticism is not meant for a small *elite*. God wants the best for all His children.

E. Practical conclusions

1.) Extraordinary mysticism, or mysticism of passive gifts, is not necessary for the highest holiness, and this for many reasons. In the first place Vatican II declares that every Christian by virtue of his baptism is invited to the holiness of Christ and consequently to follow Christ as closely as possible.⁴¹ All Christians, then, are called to the perfection of charity according to the measure of grace given to them. Obviously not all are called to extraordinary mysticism. In point of fact there is no mention of contemplation of mysticism in Chapter Five of the Constitution on the Church. The conclusion is that Christian perfection does not consist in the quality of prayer much less in its quantity.

Secondly, ways such as the Little Way of St. Theresa of Lisieux is not the way of extraordinary mysticism. Often the Little Way is simply assumed to be identical with extraordinary mysticism of St. Theresa of Avila. But this assumption is ill-founded. This has been proved by Herman-Josef Lauter in an enlightening article.⁴²

It is true that Theresa of Lisieux did experience a few isolated mystical phenomena - some visions, the spiritual piercing with the flaming dart, a kind of spiritual rapture. But nowhere does she attest to what St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross call "union". Indeed, such experiences are not consonant with her 'little way'. What the 'little saint' understands by union is simply and exclusively a childlike and trustworthy submission to God's will, a union of love in the darkness of faith.

The goal upon which St. Theresa of Lisieux's every effort is focused is something entirely different from the mystical marriage. Her mystical experiences are not typical of her way; they

41. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, Chapter 5

42. Herman-Josef Lauter, "High Mysticism and the Little Way", *Theology Digest*, 9 (1961) pp. 52-53

remain accidental, a mere by-product unessential to the completeness of the little way. Once she had found her way, the saint instinctively sensed that extraordinary mysticism had no part in it. "Never have I craved extraordinary favours. This is not part of my little way." She believed that her "story" would be useful to all souls, "with the exception of those who are following extraordinary ways".⁴³

Few saints followed the way of extraordinary mysticism if we disregard isolated mystical experiences. Even St. Francis of Sales, the "teacher of perfection," is no exception. Against the logic of a unified system, experience speaks in favour of the special character of the extraordinary mystical vocation.⁴⁴

Thirdly, as the author quoted above observes, a more objective view of the matter is taken in contemplative convents than in theological centres. Marie de Jesus, the saintly Mother Superior of the Carmelite monastery in Dijon, where Elizabeth of the Trinity also lived, gives the following advice to a young sister: "Either (the spiritual life in Mount Carmel leads, God willing, to mystical union, or it grows so much in the theological virtues that, the life of faith is transfigured and transformed, and the dawn of vision almost breaks."⁴⁵

The Mother Superior of a German Carmelite Convent wrote the following letter in reply to questions: "I am familiar with the passages (of John of the Cross) which you quote but I believe that the touch of God explained by advanced mystics is now granted to very few people. Not that God has become less generous in His dispensation of grace, or that men have become less susceptible. In our time, God seems to prefer holiness ripened in dark faith and in staunch fidelity, as exemplified by a little St. Theresa, St. Conrad, and others. Whether this is really so, I do not know; but I have never met in my whole life a mystic of the type of our predecessors in the Order."⁴⁶

Fourthly, all are agreed that closeness to God consists exclusively in the love of God and our neighbour. So there is

43. *Ibid.*, p. 53

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53

44. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*, p. 54

no hitch in concluding that extraordinary mystical life is not the normal term of the growth of the supernatural virtues and gifts. It is a special call.

2) As a consequence a certain author rightly exhorts us not to be disheartened if we have never known anything like mystical contemplation. We need not think we have not lived the consecrated life properly just because we cannot now call ourselves, or be called by competent authority, mystics in the sense that our prayer has been, or is, manifestly passive. And, above all, we need not, for a single moment, consider ourselves abnormal or subnormal because we have not reached that development which some books on prayer say is the *normal* development of the spiritual life. For it is simply not true that the ascetic life, lived to the utmost, inevitably leads to extraordinary mystical prayer. Normally, we cannot be mystics without first having been ascetics but we may well be true mystics without ever having known extraordinary mysticism.⁴⁷

We can see persons of equal good will and generosity, in the same environment and under the same director, develop differently. One is seen to reach mysticism very rapidly, another very slowly, another not at all. Perfection and extraordinary mysticism are not synonymous. The practical conclusion is that we should rest satisfied with the native endowment that is ours, to rejoice that God has given us so much and to concentrate our efforts on, rather than to study their effects. It will do us little good to be continually taking our spiritual temperature, feeling the pulse of our souls and counting our mystical respirations. The truths to be remembered are that we are called to be mystics (not necessarily mystics of prayer, but mystics of life), and secondly, that if we advance in grace and tend towards perfection we shall inevitably enter the mystical life.⁴⁸

Variety is the spice of life, and God the Holy Spirit likes the mystical life to be spicy. Granted that His life is fundamentally one, it remains patiently true that it can assume the most varied forms, not only because there are seven gifts, but

47. M. Raymond, "Mystical Life - Mystical Prayer", *Review for Religious*, 8 (1949) pp. 123-124

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126

also because the Holy Spirit, their Initiator, can set them in motion according to His good pleasure and have the same gift shine differently in different persons. Who cannot distinguish Catherine of Sienna from Theresa of Avila; Theresa of Avila from John of the Cross; John of the Cross from Paul of the Cross; Paul of the Cross from Ignatius of Loyola; Ignatius of Loyola from Francis Xavier; Francis Xavier from Francis of Assisi, etc, etc? – all of them mystics with mystical prayer, but each as different from the other as star from star and individual from individual.

If the Holy Spirit should wish our sanctification to assume a distinctly contemplative character, He will make use principally of the gifts of wisdom and understanding; but should He desire our life to be less contemplative and express itself in a mysticism that is predominately *active* – e.g., in the perfection of humility, or obedience, or some other religious virtue, or in the suffering of trials alone with holy abandonment; or in zeal for souls along with an intense interior life – He will call upon the active gifts rather than the contemplative, and we will be mystics, truly, though not those of mystical prayer.

Evidently these active mystics will be prayerful souls; their prayer will be simple, tender, and childlike. But remarkable though they be as men of prayer, the more remarkable trait about them will be their mysticism of action. Wisdom and understanding will not be as manifest in their lives as will be counsel, knowledge, piety, fortitude, and fear of the Lord. Mystical prayer is not for all, though mystical life is.

We are all called to be mystics, but not all of us to be mystics of prayer. There is a mysticism of action and a mysticism of suffering. Each of us has to get into one or other of these mysticisms, some of us perhaps in all three. But we should not grow disheartened just because our temperament, disposition, and present occupation militate against anything like the mysticism of prayer.⁴⁹

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-129

3) What then is the purpose of extraordinary mysticism? Theologians offer at least three purposes⁵⁰. In the first place, to prevent extraordinary mysticism from becoming merely a special luxury in the order of salvation, we must see in it a true charism, a favour granted principally for the common good and the glory of the Church. Extraordinary mysticism is a divine gift of prophetic character. It is a powerful witness of the epiphany of the Son of God, of time invaded by eternity, of rebirth in God, and of the beginning of eternal life.

Secondly, of even more importance, extraordinary mysticism has exerted its power in all ages to attract souls to the inner life. As a genuine charism, extraordinary mysticism points forth its rays beyond the narrow sphere of personal existence.

Thirdly, extraordinary mysticism reveals with deepest insight the divine existence in which God moulds his saints. And what better revelation is there of the unimaginable joys of heaven than the descriptions of the transforming union of the deifying marriage, that immersion of the spirit in the flooding torrents of light and love of the divine life!

4) Today's encounter with eastern religions and the results of research into depth psychology have thrown much light on the problem of the "direct action of God". It is becoming clearer day by day that human endeavour is able to achieve much more than we thought possible previously.

The modern encounter with Oriental mysticism has obliged us to speak with less of the traditional reticence, and we find ourselves forced to ask if mysticism can, after all, be taught - in the way that any other prayer is taught. For the fact is that the holy men of the East are adept in teaching a form of concentration that is astonishingly similar to the prayer of quiet. The Hindu, for example, will teach how through the repetition of a single word or phrase (known as the *mantra*) one can reach a deep level of silent, wordless consciousness. He will guide his disciple to a species of transcendental meditation that is beyond images. Sometimes this will be achieved by the constant reading

50. Herman-Josef Lauter, "High Mysticism and the Little Way" *loc. cit.*, p. 54

of, and meditation on, a single passage of scripture. One penetrates deeper and deeper until this passage becomes one's life and one's very ego is submerged. In Zen Buddhism, too, the hours of silent sitting (with or without the paradoxical problem called "the koan") quickly effects a state of deep concentration known in Japanese as *san'mai*. Silent, supraconceptual, imageless, dark and empty – to this state can be applied many of the words that Christian mystics use to describe their prayer. In short, Hinduism and Buddhism have ways of tapping deep layers of the psychic life and inducing a state of consciousness which, from the psychologist's point of view, differs little from infused contemplation. It is true, of course, that in its final stages Eastern meditation too speaks of an incalculable factor, of something quite unpredictable – this is the ultimate enlightenment that no master can teach and no disciple can achieve unless it comes from a force outside which, even in Zen, has been called "grace". But this is at the end. Before this stage is reached much has been taught by the wisdom of the Eastern guru.⁵¹

In conclusion it can be safely stated that though extraordinary mysticism is beyond the reach of human effort, much more mysticism can be taught than has been realized until recently. The spiritual theology of prayer needs to be updated against the background of Oriental mysticism and contemporary psychology.

5) Mysticism is meant also for lay people. The word mysticism should not suggest the idea of a vocation that is far removed from ordinary people and exclusively meant for those who live in a monastic environment of solitude and silence. It is meant also for those who share the distracting and often harassing life in the world. Those who are immersed in the affairs of the world, who soil their hands with clay while helping to construct a better tomorrow, who share in the daily joys and sorrows of their day-to-day struggle, are not excluded from mysticism. Even the fatigue that comes from the struggle for daily bread and an enervating rhythm of life, which scarcely permits time to breathe, are not incompatible with contemplation.

At first sight it is difficult to believe that there is a path through all this rush and clatter of life to contemplation and

51. W. Johnston, "Mystical Prayer – Can it be Taught?", *loc. cit.*, p. 761

mysticism. But the example of Christ, the perfect mystic, should give us confidence. He experienced in His life all the tragic conditions that have been described and many more. Christ who retired from the crowd into the desert for forty days spent thirty-three years in the midst of men.

Even the busiest layman has the obligation and the capability to make prayer the staple food of his spiritual life. Every talent and opportunity in this area has to be diligently and promptly investigated. Any negligence in this field, under the pretext that one is not a proficient in prayer, is an evasion of a serious responsibility.

There is nothing professional about prayer. Specialists in the theology of prayer are not necessarily the most prayerful people. To pray is to walk with God, and all can do it. Nobody should wait for certain qualifications before he starts praying. There are some who feel that they are not worth to pray. They would like to purify and perfect themselves before approaching God in prayer. These persons should know that the first step towards purification is prayer. They need to begin with prayer. Without prayer they cannot even make a start.

If we have the readiness to know and love God we have the ability to pray. We are commanded to love God and therefore we must be able to love Him; if we are able to love God we are able to pray. It is true that many persons do not pray as well as they would like to. It is also true that many people who think they are not really praying are engaged in continual prayer. Their humble acceptance of their inability to pray and their constant entreaty to God for help is an admirable instance of true prayer. These simple people have hardly heard about contemplation and mysticism. They have neither visions nor ecstasies. However they plod along their ordinary path of life with courage and determination lamenting their faults and distractions, yet making sincere efforts to grow in prayer. These persons are very close to God and advanced in prayer although they may not be aware of the fact.

The Primacy of Prayer and Personal Fulfilment

Here the long-term fulfilment of man rather than his short-term fulfilment is considered. There are experiences that are immediately satisfying, e. g., eating pudding, and there are those that are satisfying only after a length of time. From the short-term point of view prayer may not be self-fulfilling because many people pray and do not find much happiness in it. But it brings lasting happiness if one perseveres in it.

The experience of a person after a sufficiently long life of prayer is comparable to springtime. He feels as if he has put on a new pair of glasses and sees things in a new way. Hitherto the world was somehow strange and threatening. Now it is friendly because it is God's world. Other people cease to be our rivals and become our brothers and sisters since we have a common Father. Wherever we are, we are with God. We see Him in everything and there is an abundance of joy and abiding peace. Our life becomes a foretaste of heaven.

A. Prayer and spiritual fulfilment

a. Creatures and fulfilment

Most human beings form in their minds an idea of happiness that is a combination of pleasure, wealth, status and power. It is not difficult to show that this concept of happiness leaves much to be desired.

1) Self-fulfilment does not consist in power and bodily pleasure. A vacation, for instance, may refresh our bodies, but that, in itself, without anything further, cannot give happiness to the spirit. The industrialized nations of the world have a higher degree of comfort than most of the other peoples and yet are not happier for all that.

We have, in history, numerous examples of persons who lacked neither power nor pleasure and who still were unhappy. One of the best examples is that of King Solomon, reputed in the ancient world for his exceptional wealth and wisdom. There was practically nothing that was wanting to him. His father David had brought the neighbouring troublesome tribes under his control and peace prevailed in Israel. After the death of his father, Solomon found himself in a situation of limitless wealth, unparalleled wisdom and a generous promise of blessings from God. News spread through the length and breadth of the ancient world about his rare qualities. Several foreign dignitaries paid courtesy visits to him.

According to the biblical account as recorded in *Second Chronicles*, Solomon disposed of such wealth and power as to make modern millionaires appear poverty-stricken and helpless. He had more than money and power. The Bible states that Solomon loved "many strange women"¹. He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. To please these women he maintained 1400 chariots and twelve thousand horsemen. He moreover ordered for them the best available fabrics.²

Over and above all this King Solomon had the power to do whatever he liked. In *Ecclesiastes*, Solomon tells us how he tried everything under the sun with a view to obtaining happiness but in vain continuous entertainment became tiresome.³ He resorted to drinking with the hope that bottles would give him happiness; but to no avail. He put up monuments to his name. They promoted his self-esteem but did not make him happier. He constructed stately palaces for himself and elaborate temples to the gods of his pagan wives. He planted vineyards and raised gardens containing all sorts of rare plants. He admitted that "anything I wanted, I took, and did not restrain myself from any joy".⁴ In short, Solomon possessed fame, wealth, power and pleasure. He had everything he wanted. Perfect human comfort was his lot.

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1. *1 Kings* 11: 1
 2. *1 Kings* 10: 28-29
 3. *Eccl* 2: 2
 4. *Eccl* 2: 9-10

Yet, according to his own admission, Solomon was miserable: "So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind."⁵ He was so fed up with his life that he even thought of committing suicide. Yes, wealth, sexual freedom and high social position do not necessarily produce happiness. A person who does not have any of these things can be happy.

2) Involvement is unable to satisfy man. The passion for involvement, in itself, can only serve to dissipate a person and make him less effective and fulfilled. We can never be happy unless we bring our personhood fully into being. Doing this is a self-making activity sharply distinct from performing things. An undue passion for activity results in the unmaking of the person with the consequent effect of under-achievement and frustration.

3) Fulfilment does not consist in learning. Many a seeker of knowledge knows moments when he staggers under the weight of his studies and wonders if all his learning is worth the cost. There is often a conflict between the spirit and mind of man, in so far as their fulfilment does not necessarily coincide. The mind is interested in knowing, the spirit in possessing. What the mind considers as enriching is often trivial to the spirit. Knowledge does not touch the core of the human person. Knowledge is no more than the possession of the image of reality. The spirit is satisfied with nothing less than actual existence and all that is good in it. It is not rare for a philosopher who steepes himself in dusty facts to discover that he has missed something most precious in life.

4) Fulfilment does not consist in professional success. Success in one's profession cannot effect personal unity. A serious achievement-goal can undoubtedly gather together the different forces in a person. It can unify his energies and lead him to unsuspected achievements. Yet high achievement itself is no pointer to personal fulfilment. Professional success is not the same as success as a person.

Karl Jung has collected psychological case histories of a number of very successful career people in his book, *Modern Man*:

5. *Ecc* 2: 17

in Search of a Soul. These successful people appear in the book precisely because as persons they were resounding failures. Why does this happen? It happens because the principle around which these people organized their lives was less enduring than life itself. By tremendous zeal and effort these people often reach professional success and middle age simultaneously. Their bank accounts and prestige have mounted, but their bodies are beginning to fall away from strain and age. They inevitably ask themselves what they have that is lasting. What has it all been for? They discover that the unifying principle (success) which has worked so well for a time no longer has attractive force to act as the magnetic centre of their being. They literally feel themselves coming apart. All the energies and desires and powers they were once able to assemble and command are now flying in all direction, or simply slumping in dormancy. A maelstrom of meaninglessness swirls within them. At an age when they should already have achieved personhood they awake to the realization that unless they can discover a new emergency centre of coalescence within themselves they are threatened with mental collapse. They have made the mistake of espousing a false principle, temporarily powerful, but less durable than even the flesh.⁶

5) Even service to others cannot by itself lead to self-fulfilment. The unity of personhood cannot be built around mere philanthropy. By way of example, let us visualize a religious whose only passion is renewal of religious life. When the renewal has been achieved he leaves the religious life. This is hardly surprising because the unifying principle of his life, namely, renewal, has become obsolete and ceases to motivate him. He is left in a vacuum without any unifying principle. He has nothing more to do in religious life. He searches for a new adventure outside.

b. The human spirit as an incarnated thirst for the Infinite

Man is an incarnated thirst. Though finite he seeks after infinity. Seemingly man, being finite, should be satisfied with

6. Herbert Smith, "Prayer and Personhood in the Woman", *Sisters Today*, 42 (1971) p. 356

experiences of finite goods but the fact is the opposite. This is a well-known experience. The unending thirst of man is at the basis of the problem of meaningfulness. Man's craving is continuous unlike that of the animal. He is satisfied only with totality. That explains why no amount of finite experiences can ever fully satiate him. In as much as he is a spirit he reaches out to the Infinite.

Thomas Dubay's explanation of man as incarnated thirst is clear⁷.

The human person is by nature a perennial pilgrim insatiably on the search. Mere animals seek but not in the same endless way. A squirrel stops seeking when he has achieved a sufficiency of nuts, but man never attains a sufficiency. His spirit, being universally open to all that is, drives him on relentlessly to new pursuits and new achievements. We are dealing here with no imperfection in his incarnated spirit. The more alive a person is, the more thirsty he is.

Man's spirit is a universal need for more. The "more" is not this or that, for particulars never satisfy him. If he is an intellectual his curiosity is invariably stimulated by a new promising book in his field. He would not dream of calling a halt to his quest for knowledge. If he is an artist, a new exhibition always draws him on to desire to visit it and to read about it. If he is a traveller one trip completed simply stimulates him to begin planning the next one.

Even on the everyday level we seek endlessly to know and experience more: we look up spontaneously to see who has just entered the room; we are avid for the latest rumour; we turn on the television for the news day after day. There is no end to our pursuit of knowledge even when it does not transcend the trivial. Nor is there ever an end to our desire to love and be loved. No one has ever had enough of genuine love. Even when a person has found his ideal, there lurks deep in his heart the fear that he may lose her by default, by illness, death. At best human love is temporary, while the spirit demands that it should be

7. Thomas Dubay, *Pilgrims Pray*, New Delhi, 1975, pp. 44-48

eternal. The cloud of transitoriness forever hangs low. Human happiness is always a not-yet.

The human spirit points to a quest beyond the empirical, tangible universe. The duck is content with its pond and the squirrel with its tree, but man is never content with anything. Open to all, to the universal, his spirit is transcendent. Through it he bursts beyond the finite, empirical universe in a quest for the unlimited. He seeks a beauty to rejoice his eye and goodness to rest his heart. He is emptiness pursuing a fullness.

Man is a pilgrim. Indeed, we are restless pilgrims never satisfied in what we can see and touch, for we plod toward that which the eye has not seen nor the ear heard, the homeland that it has not even occurred to the heart of man to imagine.

The pilgrim pursuit can be seen, likewise, through the polar realities of boredom and joy. Negatives sometimes serve as eloquent witnesses to positives. Darkness makes light more brilliant to the eye. Blindness bestows an appreciation of sight. There is the existential boredom. It is not a question of *ennui* stemming from this lecture or that book, this occupation or that conversation. It is rather, an all-pervading discontent with human existence as such. One is not storming against this social evil, this racial injustice, that cruel war. One is vigorously at odds with the whole human enterprise. One finds being human in this universe unsatisfactory.

What is this all-pervading *ennui*? It is an apathy toward living. It is important to note that this apathy, satiety, monotony, frustration is general, is not merely centred on something particular: It is unfocused, unspecified. Even though a person finds most particular happenings dull, it is their enveloping atmosphere of *ennui* that is especially intolerable.

Existential boredom is compatible with pleasure, but not with joy. Burdened with an omnipresent weariness, the bored man may experience momentary pleasures in sports or power, food or drink, drugs, or sexual activity, but he finds these partial and basically unsatisfying. He does not enjoy the pervading peace that

accompanies a life of integrity wholly directed to God. He knows something of fleeting stimulation, but nothing of the delight of the saint.

c. Full happiness in God alone

God alone is our fulfilment. The principle of personal unity and integrity must be something which speaks directly and perpetually to the heart. Neither self nor any other creature can do that. Wittingly or unwittingly it must be another person, because a person passionately dedicated to truth or beauty or goodness is implicitly dedicated to persons, for only in personal being do these realities reach their fulness. The principle of unity is where the heart is, and the heart can only be given to a person or persons. The unifying principle must be sought in a network of relationships with other persons. Paradoxically we can only unify ourselves by going out of ourselves through knowing and loving another⁸.

The process of developing as a person is a process of developing relationships. As Herbert Smith observes, there are three basic networks of relationships to be developed⁹. The first of these is wholly interior to the person. The second is the network of relationships between the person and things. The third is the network of relationships between the person and other persons. Smith investigates each of these networks admirably.

There is first the network of relationships which is the person in his interior self. Each of us is at times a maelstrom of interior seething. We feel ourselves sundered and dispersed, a stream rushing in a hundred directions. Our energies, drives, and goals threaten to tear loose individually and fly off at a tangent. Thus do we experience the fact that each of us is manifold. A man is a oneness, but he is a oneness made from many elements, and there are moments of stress when he feels every seam, and know the danger of being torn apart from within. The question of interior relationships, then, is this: where does a person find such a powerful unifying principle that he can take all this inner

3. Herbert Smith, "Prayer and Personhood in the Woman," *loc. cit.*, p. 357

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 353-366

diversity and division and make it all one? Where can he discover that mysterious point of fusion around which everything that he is can be gathered into one, to render him a totality with that strength of interior unity which is found only when all the separate grains have been welded into that sureness and firmness we call maturity? What is that mysterious centre which can seize and bind and fuse all one's personal energies to make of him one integral person who knows his identity and his meaning? Whatever it is each person must search for it, accept it, and live around it if he hopes ever to order and unify the jungle of interior relationships which compose him.

The second network relationships which must be developed for the sake of one's personhood is the network relating to things. Things are simply non-persons. This definition should make it immediately evident that a thing can never be the centre of personal integration, because to subject one's energies and aspirations to a thing would be to prostitute one's personal being. It would be to subjugate self to a non-person and therefore to something less than self. Things, therefore, can never be the goal towards which a right-living person directs his whole life. Things are properly means to personal becoming. They are never the goal of a person who is really becoming,

The third network of relationships is the network relating a person to other persons. The profound personal impact of the interpersonal relationship is summed up by Martin Buber in the telling insight: Person is in the meeting. It is only through meeting other persons in friendship and love that one's own deepest potential for personhood is energized. Life-that-is-person flares up most brightly at that point where self-consciousness touches self-consciousness in mutual appreciation. It is clear from both argument and experience that to be an actualized person one must live interpersonally.

Somewhere in these three networks of relationships lies the secret of successful development of personhood. For success, all the diversity within us must be gathered into unity, and somewhere in these three networks of relationships can be found the principle, the one around which our inner diversity can be marvellously centred and become itself one.

We saw that this principle does not consist in things, honours etc. What then is this principle? Is it one or many others? The answer is that the unitary principle is one. One is one, not two. If the principle were more than one, there would already be division at our centre and we could never be one, since our very centre would not be one. If the principle cannot be two without splitting the core of man, it obviously cannot be a person and a thing. More subtly, the principle cannot be both God and man uncritically thrown together as the one object of our love without attention to the hierarchical relationship between them. The problem comes to a focus with regard to the union of wills. Love is imperfect until it reaches this union. Happily for us, we can freely and successfully aim at this fusion of wills with God, but we must actually resist a complete fusion of wills with existential man. The reason is simply that in the concrete mankind's will continues to embrace disorder, rebellion and sin.

God is to be loved first. He, and He alone, is the unqualified principle of unity. The final test of our internal unity and of the consequent soundness of our love and service of men is whether everything is integrated into, and comes out of, our love and service of God. Love for human persons must be the overflow and the echo of a greater love.

Establishment of the unitary principle within one's heart is possible only by stern choice. The principle is God and, by extension, what He wills and what He is going to bring about. This is man's authentic centre of unity. This is the locus where we join ourselves together in one meaning and one effort and one hope.

A great truth begins to dawn from these considerations. We can reach and establish the centre of our own being only through faith. The very core of our personhood can exist only by faith. Without faith we are hollow men. The centre of our personhood, the principle around which our psyche crystalizes, is not an object whose existence we can prove, but a Being in whose existence we believe. It is God.¹⁰ This fact establishes a point of high tension. The very core of man's being, that upon which his being is

10. *Jn* 1: 18

grounded and established, is a mystery compounded by faith. Is it any wonder that a human being must struggle and strain to remain constant around this one Core?

Fulfilment is the experience of love. The highest fulfilment is the experience of the love of God. The principle of unity must be the one worthy of being loved above all else and all others. Only such a One can inspire the effort and kindle the ardour that can fuse us into one through relation to the One. Life and literature are full of the tragedies of the broken lives of men and women who have ignored this truth. The unitary principle must be a person, but it cannot be a human person or we are building our house on sand.

Fulfilment without God is spurious and therefore precarious. It may work for a time. It may appear to work for a lifetime. One may discover, only when one comes face to face with God, what folly his life has been. God Himself complains of such folly.¹¹ God alone is the unshifting, immovable Rock anchored in eternity, Himself being Eternity.

Nothing that has been said here is meant to imply that right relationship to God is the only thing necessary for whole and personal fulfilment. God alone does not make for a well-developed personality any more than the girders of a skyscraper make a complete building. Perfect personhood, like most perfect works, involves many causes. The lack of any principal cause ruins the work, and only the blend of all causes makes a perfect work.

d. Prayer as the means to fulfilling communion with God

The unceasing thirst of man for happiness can be quenched only by the perfect possession of God through knowing-loving. Prayer is this knowing-loving. Our relationship to God, the unifying principle of our person, is beyond knowledge and experience but it implies conscious and loving communication with Him. What we mean by prayer is this communication.

11. *Jer* 2 : 12 - 13

In our daily life we relate to others by meeting them and conversing with them. We come to know persons and establish fellowship with them through conversation. The same is true of our relationship with God. Meeting God and conversing with Him is absolutely necessary for entering into relationship with Him.

God is love and prayer is meeting God in love. In as much as prayer is a love-encounter with God it can never be a means to anything. It is the highest expression of love and as such has its purpose in itself. Since prayer is interpersonal relationship with God, it is the purpose of human existence. Everything else including work and involvement is ordained towards this end. Prayer should not be considered as a means to fulfilment though fulfilment is its consequence.

B. Prayer and psychological fulfilment

a. Prayer and self-identity

Prayer is a wonderful help in the achievement of self-identity.¹² One of the gravest issues facing contemporary man is the problem of alienation. Modern man feels alienated from himself, from God and from the society of men. As prayer develops self-awareness, it develops and deepens one's love relationship with God and the society of men.

The contemporary man of industrial-technological society to a large extent finds himself in a very ironical position. With his fantastically advanced knowledge, he has increasingly controlled and shaped his material world. He has achieved knowledge to a highly precise degree of what we might call the identity of the material world. But modern man's self-identity more and more eludes him. In directing so much of his quest for knowledge at the material world outside himself, he has increasingly become a stranger to his own self. He has failed to look within. He has failed to know himself.

In prayer self-awareness is not achieved in an isolated, self-enclosed fashion. Self-identity is achieved through encounter

12. Edward Carter, "Prayer and Life", *Review for Religious*, 32 (1973) pp. 747-748

with God. No one can come to know himself except as the outcome of disclosing himself to another. If we need an encounter with a human person in order to grow in self-knowledge, much more do we need to encounter God in prayer to achieve self-identity and self-integration. In prayer God shows us all this as He allows us to realize that He loves us. We begin really to be, really to achieve our true self-identity when we begin to realize how much God loves us. God helps us achieve our self-identity and self-integration by showing us what we uniquely are and what we are called to be.

Achieving self-identity through encounter with God in prayer is not a completely painless task. The light of prayer shows us our uniqueness, our particular talents and gifts, the good we have already achieved, and the possibilities of further growth in Christian holiness. But God, through the light of prayer, also shows us our evil side. He shows us how we have failed Him, how we have wasted opportunities to love Him and others, how much our search for self-integration and union with Him has been obstructed because of our selfishness. How deeply the light of prayer can penetrate one's being and uncover the unpleasant side of nature is graphically attested to by some of the saints. As they grew in prayer, the light of prayer illuminated pockets of selfishness and pride that had previously escaped their awareness. The light of prayer, then, helps one achieve self-identity and self-integration by illuminating both the good and evil dimensions of one's existence. Finally, this illuminating encounter with God in prayer always has a thrust towards bringing us into closer union with Him. This light of prayer shows us our unique self and what we should become. It also shows us that we are made for God and how lovable this God is. All this is intended to deepen our love relationship with God. In turn as we come closer to Him, we become more ourselves. We achieve a greater existential hold on our true identity.

b. Prayer and eternalization of life and action

For everyone of us life is a chain of many failures and many half-accomplished achievements. A glance at our past life is generally not a source of encouragement and satisfaction. The balance sheets of even the most remarkable lives are tainted

with alarming deficiencies. Even the greatest genius has in all honesty, to characterize a large part of his life as useless.

Even our most sensational days are filled with trifles. Insecurity is the companion of enterprising business. For every victory there is a dozen instances of humiliating defeats. The builders of empires are hardly dead and gone before their empires begin to crack and break down. The literature that is an attraction to one generation is an abomination to another. Yesterday's science is outmoded today. Thoughts of thinkers become stale platitudes before they leave this world.

Our life is often a conglomeration of abortive efforts. The ludicrous and the absurd are its constant companions. We work to produce a literary or artistic work and read it over with dissatisfaction. We try all our power of persuasion on others and frequently meet with empty stares or with applause whose sincerity seems to disappear before its own last echo vanishes. In less than twenty years after our death our tombstones gather moss which when cleared make passers-by wonder who the duffer was who was buried there.

Millions of great men have walked and worked on the face of this earth. They have struggled valiantly, loved ardently, lived generously and laboured diligently. Yet not more than five thousand of them have received a place in the annals of history. All the others have been forgotten in the onrush of inexorable history.

Our life and activity would present a very discouraging picture if it were not for the fact of prayer and the Mystical Body. If we were alone in our work our activity would be no more than like the colonies that ants build before a crumbling landslide. The fact of prayer reassures us that we do not labour alone. When we are prayerful everything that we do, our failures as well as successes, assumes profound significance and everlasting importance. It is Christ our Head who in some sense moves our hands, propels our feet, and works our body. The person who is united to God through prayer is great even in the least of his works. The supreme importance of prayer is nowhere

more obvious than in this eternalization of our transient life and activity.

In the context of a prayerful life all our actions, both small and great, take on a new dignity. In the case of Christ, God Incarnate, there is no question of insignificant actions. When we are united with Him through prayer our actions become His.

The carpenter who is prayerful knows that his trade is the same as that of his Master. When he lifts his hammer to strike he realizes that he is united with the Mystical Body of Christ. A divine force aids him to strike the blows. The motivation of his work is united with the intentions of Christ.

The lawyer sees his client who is poor and dirty, whose hands are soiled with crime and whose soul is sick. Because of his prayerfulness he realizes that his profession is identical with that of Christ who stood for the poor, weak and miserable. As he moves his pen to write his brief he is inspired with renewed interest because his hand is part of the mystical Body of Christ. His brain clicks faster as he is moved with the same thoughts of mercy and compassion as Christ.

The mother who attends to her baby, the wife who is busy with the neverending routine of a house always in disorder, the secretary who types business correspondence, the teacher who has to handle a group of restless and uninspiring children, the nurse who meets with annoying complaints from ungracious patients, the scrub-woman who moves across the cold corridors on her knees, can eternalize their actions if they are prayerful. They are acting with Christ and consequently their actions, even though trivial and ugly in the eyes of men, are very precious in the eyes of their heavenly Father. God looks upon their actions as vitalized by the divine life of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

In the life of Christ there were neither real failures nor any trivial actions, and this is true of those who are united with Christ through prayer. No action of theirs is insignificant, no task is commonplace, no achievement is transitory. Everything they do is indelibly recorded in the heart of God. The powerful

ones of this world will be forgotten one day but those who have lived and acted in prayerful union with Christ will share in His eternal triumph. Prayer eternalizes our actions.

c. The fulfilling capacity of prayer and Holy Scripture

Christ Himself has pointed out prayer as the way to the fulness of joy: "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."¹³ All of us desire to have the fulness of joy. The way to it is prayer in the name of Jesus.

Prayer again is the means proposed to us by God for our liberation from anxiety and the attainment of peace which surpasses all understanding: "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."¹⁴ To many this may appear to be admirable but beyond the capacity of ordinary humans. But the text clearly states that the peace in question is attainable by all. All one has to do is to keep in constant contact with God regarding every event of one's life, but always with gratitude for what one has already received.

We are all acquainted with persons whose joy is abundant, a joy that appears to ooze out at their lips and fingertips. They radiate joy wherever they go. They are always serene and peaceful. Difficulties and crosses may sweep around them but the surpassing peace of God reigns in their heart. Persons who experience the unfathomable peace and joy of God are always those who pray much. Invariably such people spend long spells in communion with God.

These persons are joyful chiefly because their prayer has made God a living reality in their life. He is no more an idea for them. When we talk to God in love He becomes someone very real. Nothing can give greater joy either in this world or

13. *Jn* 16: 24

14. *Phil* 4: 6-7

in the next than communion with God which is the result of prayer. The Psalmist was not merely alluding to future joy, but also to present happiness when he said, "In thy presence there is fulness of joy."¹⁵

Some of us are too busy to spend some time in prayer, and the result is constant anxiety and worry. One hour of prayer can be a remedy against several hours of sleeplessness. The time spent in prayer is time invested in the bank of serenity, joy and peace.

Kurien Mathew

15. *Ps* 16: 11

The Religious Experience of St. Francis of Assisi*

An individual's spiritual life is determined and coloured by his religious experience. By religious experience is meant, some kind of awareness of, and response to, the divine, largely achieved in terms of discerning the divine presence, and ones' total dependence upon the divinity¹. This may occur under God's providential guidance, creating such dispositions of soul, in which man becomes actually aware of his limitations and sinfulness, and his need for God. The experience is subjective, but with foundations in external realities, and his own past history. These external elements can determine his particular mode of perception of God. This explains why one may have a strong perception of certain attributes of God, while another may perceive certain other attributes. Such religious experience moves the soul beyond the abstract concepts of faith to an intuitive experience of God, involving interpersonal relationship.

At the basis of Francis' religious experience, there was in him first of all, a vision, most profound and fascinating of the immensity, 'transcendence', and of the boundless goodness of God, and a corresponding realization of his nothingness and sinfulness. Secondly, he had a unique experience of the Crucified Jesus. Thirdly, he had an exceptional perception of the fatherhood of God, and consequently, of the universal brotherhood of all creatures². In the following pages we shall look at those factors which contributed to this experience and how they had a great bearing on his prayer-life.

* This is a chapter of a forthcoming book entitled *Hunger and Thirst for God*.

1. W. J. Will, "religious Experience", in *N. C. Ency.* Vol, V, pp. 751-753.

2. U, Occhialini, "San Francesco e suo rapporto personale con Dio", in *Quad. Spir. Franc.* 14 (1967) pp. 37-51.

A. The first confrontation with the Lord

The process of Francis' conversion extended itself over seven long years from 1202, when he fell seriously ill, until 24th Feb. 1208, when he received the final enlightenment from the words of the Gospel³. According to his first biographer and his own testimony (Testamēni), Francis, until his 25th year, lived a life in the flesh⁴. Being engrossed in the pleasures and glories of the world, he was completely closed to God.

It was when he was struck by a severe and prolonged illness, following the imprisonment at Perugia, that he gradually opened himself to the voice of God. God sometimes leads man to the wilderness of trials and sufferings in order to dispose him to listen to His word, as he says through the prophet Hosea: 'I lead her into the desert, and there I will speak to her heart' (2:14). Worn down by illness he began to realize the vanities of the world, and "he began to think of things other than he was used to be thinking upon"⁵. It was an inward looking, in the light he received from God, into the depth of his soul, and for that reason beyond the soul, to God. His vision of life began to change. Celano writes that 'from that time on, he began to despise himself and to hold in contempt the things he had admired and loved before'⁶. However, he could not liberate himself fully from his long-standing evil tendencies.

When he recovered, he was still dreaming of earthly glory. The dream which he had of the magnificent palace full of armour and a beautiful wife⁷, might have been even a "wish-fulfilment". Believing it to be a guarantee of his future glory, he joined the

3. 1 Cel., non. 1-23. *Omnibus* of Sources, Chicago, 1972, pp. 229-247. For the chronological reference we follow the research study made by Englebert, *St. Francis of Assisi*, Chicago, (1965) pp. 364-396.

Thomas Celans, *The First Life of St. Francis*, hereafter referred to as 1 Cel.

4. 1 Cel. non. 1-3. *Omnibus*, pp. 229-234.

5. 1 Cel., n. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 231.

6. *Ibid.*, n. 4, p. 232

7. 2 Cel., n. 6, *Ibid.*, p. 365

Papal army, under the leadership of a certain Court of Assisi, and set out for Apulia to a battle⁸. It was on the way, at Spoleto, that he had the decisive confrontation with the Lord in a vision, in which he was called to His service⁹. Obeying the voice of God, he returned home.

Francis was sure that the Lord had called him, but the way he had to tread was obscure. He was thrown into confusion and led into solitude where he listened to God's voice¹⁰. There he opened his heart to the illuminative and creative light of God. That light revealed the recess of his emptiness. As J. Tauler observes:

The brighter and purer the light shed on us by the greatness of God, the more clearly do we see our littleness and nothingness. In fact it is how we may discern the genuineness of this illumination; for it is the Divine God shining into our very being, not through images, not through faculties, but in the very depth of our soul. Its effects will be to make us sink down more and more deeply into our own nothingness¹¹.

As long as we live at a distance from God, so to speak, as long as His presence or image is dimmed in our consciousness, we may not be aware of the contrast that exists between what God is and what we are. But as Archbishop Anthony Bloom says: 'the nearer we come to God, the sharper the contrast appears..... It is against the background of the divine presence that sins stand in full relief, and acquire their depth and tragedy'¹². This was Francis' experience. His emptiness and sinfulness, brought out in full relief by the light of God, horrified him. On the one hand he grieved bitterly for having shut God out of his life for so long, and on the other, he had great fear that his weak nature might fall back into its old ways. T. Celano narrating his prayer in the grotto during this period says,

8. For the historical background cf. J. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, Oxford, (1968) pp. 3-10

9. 2 Cel., n. 6, *Omnibus*, p. 365

10. 1 Cel., n. 6, *Ibid.*, p. 237

11. J. Tauler, quoted by T. Merton, in *Contemplative Prayer*, London, (1975) p. 95

12. A. Bloom, *Living Prayer*, London, (1966), p. 11

He repented that he had sinned so grievously and had offended the eyes of God's majesty, and neither the past nor the present gave him any delight. Still he had not won full confidence that he would be able to guard himself against his old vices in the future. Consequently when he came out (of the grotto) again to his companion, he was so exhausted with the strain, that one person seemed to have entered and another to have come out.¹³

Francis was here reduced to nothingness. Looking back he found his life a waste, looking ahead he saw his utter helplessness.

At this juncture there were two possible directions he could follow: one leading to death, which is despair. That would be despising his whole existence, because it would not make him a god, as was not self-sufficient. This is the direction the so-called philosophy of despair takes¹⁴. The second possible direction is a certain positive realization of one's fundamental nothingness and helplessness, which will lead to salvation. "Of myself I am nothing", said St. Paul, and one who comes to such a realization, and does not insist on acting by himself, but humbly turns to the Lord who alone can act, is saved. For as K. Rahner states: "It is in the darkness of one's knowledge of complete personal worthlessness, that the light of the presence of God begins to dawn; it is in the realization of one's own utter powerlessness that the power of God becomes active, springing up into life everlasting"¹⁵.

This was the direction that Francis took. The deep, realization of his nothingness and misery is testified in his Rule of 1221: "By our own fault we are corrupt, wretched, strangers to all good, willing and eager only to do evil"¹⁶. Hence, "distrusting his own efforts, he cast his whole care upon the Lord".¹⁷

13. 1 Cel., n. 6, *Omnibus*, p. 234

14. K. Rahner, in his book *On Prayer*, New York, 1968 pp. 10-12, beautifully describes the situation of the one who chooses this direction.

15. K. Rehner, *Ibid.*, p. 14

16. Rule of 1221, *Omnibus*, p. 47

17. 1 Cel., n. 10, *Ibid.*, p. 238

With this total surrender of himself to the all good and powerful God, there came a deep and lasting peace, "a confidence without fear, a security that needs no assurance, a power that lives in powerlessness, a life that springs up in the shadow of death".¹⁸ Nothing was left with him but God. He found peace, joy and strength in the thought that God was with him and that he was His.

This death-resurrection experience, of being plunged deep into his own nothingness and powerlessness and raised to life and strength by the goodness of God, instilled several fundamental religious attitudes in Francis, which were the basis of his prayer-life. We shall consider the most important ones.

(1) Experience of salvation and gratitude

Ever since the conversion, to the end of his life, Francis thought of himself as a recipient of the graciousness of God. The principal reason for his untiring practice of thanksgiving and praise of God is to be found here. Thanksgiving is a fundamental religious reaction of man, when he discovers, in a thrill of joy and veneration, the gift of God and salvation. The closer he comes to God, the more he forgets himself and turns from the gifts to the giver Himself, and thanksgiving will be dominated by praise. Praise is, therefore, more theocentric, more lost in God and more conducive to ecstasy.¹⁹

Most of the prayers of Francis which are found in his writings, are saturated with praises and thanksgiving.²⁰ He was so convinced of the duty of every creature to praise God, that in all his letters, admonitions and Rules, he urges others to praise God with all their might. In the letter to the Faithful he writes:

18. K. Rahner, *Ibid.* p. 15

19. cf. Aridour, "Praise" in *Dic. Bibl. Theo.* ed. by X. L. Dufour, New York (1967) pp. 392-394.

20. More important among them are: "The Praises of God", composed on La Verna after the reception of the Stigmata, "The Canticle of the creatures", composed during the last days of his life, and is counted among the classics of mystical poems; "Prayer of Praise before the Office; which is composed of selected scriptural passages of divine praise; The last chapter of Rule 1221, where the Saint burst into an ecstatic praise of God.

"Every creature in heaven and on earth and in the depth of the sea, should give God the praise and glory that are due to Him, so that at every hour, and when the bells are rung, praise and thanks may be offered to God almighty, by everyone all over the world".²² We again find him requesting the Rulers of the people to give a signal every evening so that "praise and thanks may be given to the Lord, God almighty by all the people".²³ He concludes the Office of the Passion with these words: "Let us bless the Lord, God living and true; let us render all praise, glory, honour and blessing and every good to Him always, Amen"²⁴. In a word, having experienced the merciful salvation, he was always conscious of his duty to praise and thank God, and as we shall see later his life was a constant praise of God, and he died singing the praises of Lord.

(2) Perception of God's holiness and greatness

Another basic attitude springing from his encounter with God was his fascinated and profound perception of the holiness, immensity and greatness of God. This is why he had a predilection for certain tributes of God such as Most High, Omnipotent, etc., which he profusely uses in his prayers²⁵. In his enthusiasm he often uses several adjectives to describe God's greatness. To give but a few examples: In the Letter to the Faithful we read:

He is our power and our strength, and He alone is good,
He alone most High, He alone most powerful, wonderful,
and glorious, He alone is holy and worthy of all
praise and blessing for endless ages.²⁶

The Praises of God begin as follows:

You are holy, Lord, the only,
And your deeds are wonderful;
you are strong,
You are most High,
You are Almighty

21. *Omnibus*, p. 97

22. *Ibid.*, p. 113

23. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

25. U. Occhialini, "San Francesco e suo rapporto....", P. 40.

26. *Omnibus*, p. 27.

Francis does not speculate on these words, nor gives any explanation, but they express his sense of God's greatness, immensity and holiness. This experience of the overwhelming mystery and greatness of God brought Francis down in worship on his knees. His attitude is eloquently expressed in the Rule of 1221:

At all times and seasons, in every country and place, every day and all day, we must have a true and humble faith, and keep Him in our hearts, where we must love, honour, adore, serve, praise and bless, glorify and acclaim, magnify and thank the most High, supreme and eternal God, three and One, Father Son and Holy spirit, Creator of all and Saviour of those who believe in Him, who hope in Him, and love Him, without beginning and without end, He is unchangeable, invisible, unfathomable, blessed and worthy of all praise, glorious, exalted, sublime, most High, kind, lovable, delightful and utterly desirable beyond all else, for ever and ever.²⁷

The intuitive vision of the Poverello, which sees the all-pervading mystery of God, and His power displayed everywhere and in everything, and which supports his own littleness, sinks into oblivion in the ecstatic praise of God. It was the expression, both spontaneous and conscious, imposed and willed, of the complex reaction of a man seized by the immensity of God. He was in a state of confusion, veneration, thankfulness and jubilant homage in all his being.²⁸

(3) Perception of God's goodness

This all powerful God is again the good Lord, nay 'the only good', 'the highest good' and 'all good'. He realized that all that he was and had was His gift. In the 'Paraphrase of the Our Father' we get a glimpse of this perception:

Who are in heaven: In the Angels and Saints. You give them light, so that they have knowledge, because You, Lord, are Light. You inflame them, so that they may love, because you,

27. *Omnibus*, p. 52.

28. cf. J. de Vaulx, "Adoration", in *Dict. Bibl. Theol.*, ed. by X. L. Dufour, pp. 6-7.

Lord, are love. You live continually in them and you fill them so that they may be happy, because You, Lord, are the supreme good, the eternal good, and it is from You all good comes, and without You there is no good.²⁹

In the 'Praises of God' the Saint again contemplates and confesses: "Lord God, all good, You are good, all good, supreme good, Lord God living and true".³⁰

Francis saw God as the infinite good and all good. From this source flows every good to us. He realizes two ways by which they reach us, namely Creation and Redemption. Hence he liked to address God as "Our Father, Creator, Redeemer, Saviour, and Consoler" (Laudes). In the Rule of 1221, he praises God acknowledging these two means, by which he communicated every good to us: "Of Your own holy will You created all things, spiritual and physical, made us in Your own image and likeness, and gave us a place in Paradise through Your only Son, in the Holy Spirit".³¹ The greatness of the gift is highlighted by the utter misery and worthlessness of the receiver. In the same Rule we read:

It was he who created and redeemed us, and of his mercy alone He will save us, wretched and pitiable as we are, ungrateful and evil, rotten through and through, He has provided us with every good and does not cease to provide for us.³²

29. *Omnibus*, p. 159, According to Julian of Norwich, "to know the goodness of God is the highest prayer of all", and she continues with her picturesque description: "Just as the body is clothed in its garments, and the flesh in its skin, and the bones in their flesh, and the heart in its body, so too are we, soul and body, clothed from head to foot in the goodness of God. Yes, even more closely than that, for all these things will decay and wear out; whereas the goodness of God is unchanging," J. of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, London, 1966, p. 70.

30. *Omnibus*, p. 125.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 50

32. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Before the boundless goodness of God the Poverello is deeply aware of his wretchedness, which made him all the more humble and grateful to God.

With this faith in God as the source of Every good, Francis had to acknowledge God's absolute claim over him, and to surrender himself totally to Him. He loved Him with an undivided heart. In the Rule of 1221 he writes:

With all our hearts and all our souls, all our mind and all our strength, all our power and all our understanding, with every faculty and every effort, with every affection and all our emotions, with every wish and desire, we should love our God, who has given us and gives us everything, body and soul and all our life³³.

The same idea is expressed in the Letter to the General Chapter. "Keep nothing for yourself, so that He who has given Himself wholly to you, may receive you wholly"³⁴.

With the perception that every good is from God, came also the conviction that every glory is due to Him. This conviction is reflected throughout his writings. In the Rule of 1221 he advises his brothers:

We must be firmly convinced that we have nothing of our own, except our vices and sins Hence we must be on our guard against pride and empty boasting we must refer every good to the most High supreme God, acknowledging that all good belongs to Him; and we must thank Him for them all, because all good comes from Him.³⁵

Then he bursts into a prayer: "May the most supreme and high and only true God receive and have and be paid all honour and reverence, all praise and blessing, all thanks and glory, for to Him belongs all good". In his 'Admonitions' he says: "Blessed the religious who refers all good he has to the

33. *Ibid*, p. 51

34. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

35. *Omnibus*, p. 45.

Lord and God. He who attributes anything to himself hides his master's money in himself, and even what he thinks he has shall be taken away'³⁶. Speaking about the right spirit of learning the S. Scripture, he refers to those who by their words and example make God known as the most High, to whom belongs all good, all that they know or wish to know, and who do not allow their knowledge to become a source of self-complacency".³⁷ Thus the conviction that every good comes from God, that he is always a receiver, made him live only for God, to render praise and thanks to God always and for everything.

(4) Choosing the Master

In the vision of Spoleto Francis heard the Lord's question: "..... why then do you serve the slave rather the Master?"³⁸ The full significance of these words became clear to him gradually in his prayer-experience, when he realized the bitterness of the servitude to the world over against the sweetness of serving the Lord, Francis had to make a choice between the two,—between, the Master and the slave—and he made the choice to serve the Master. His consciousness of this choice is clear from his own words: "We have left the world, and all we have to do is to be careful to obey God's will and please Him".³⁹

According to some authors,⁴⁰ Francis was greatly influenced by the chivalrous spirit of the knighthood. He set out on a military adventure with the thought of realizing in himself the ideals of romantic chivalry. This spirit has been sublimated to

36. Admon. XIX *Ibid.*, p. 84

37. Admon. VII, *Ibid.*, p. 81.

38. The historicity of the episode is disputed. In any case, we can reasonably believe that it might have been a question constantly ringing in his conscience during the period of his conversion, namely from the moment he felt the touch of God during his illness, throughout the period of his interior struggle for making a decision.

39. Rule of 1221, *Ominibus*, p. 47.

40. M. Von Galli, *Living our Future: St. Francis of Assisi and the Church tomorrow*, (Chicago, 1972) pp. 21-49; O. Englebert, *St. Francis of Assisi*, pp. 50, Cuthbert, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, London, (1912) pp 17-30.

make of him an excellent, faithful knight of Christ. This is confirmed by his predilection for the divine titles "Great King", "King of heaven and earth", and the repeated intimate invocation "My King".⁴¹ When he was seized by robbers and questioned, he proudly said: "I am the herald of the great King."⁴²

His only preoccupation was to serve his Master and to render himself pleasing to Him. As Fr. Cuthbert notes: "He regarded himself as waiting upon the good-will of his Lord Jesus; and his most imperious feeling now was one of intense loyalty to his divine Master".⁴³ His earnest prayer was: All powerful, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us, miserable ones, to do for You what we know is Your will, and to wish always that which pleases You".⁴⁴ He advises his friars saying: "I entreat all my friars to put away every attachment, all care and solicitude, and serve, love, honour and adore our Lord and God with a pure heart and mind. This is what we seek above all else".⁴⁵ Even when he reached an extraordinary union with God, He was desirous of knowing what could please the eternal king most.⁴⁶ He advises the friars saying that "With the help of God's grace, their whole intention should be fixed on Him with a will to please the most High alone".⁴⁷ It is with deep sorrow that he observes that "All creatures which are under heaven, serve, acknowledge and obey Creator, in their own way, better than man does".⁴⁸ In a word loyalty to his Master was his noble intention.

In sum, the first phase of his religious experience, was constituted of the above-mentioned fourfold elements namely: 1. The experience of gratuitous salvation and the resultant sense of profound gratitude, expressed in praise and thanksgiving; 2. the experience of the holiness and greatness of God, and his worshiping attitude; 3. the perception of God as the source of

41. 'Office of the Passion', *Omnibus*, pp. 141-155.

42. 1 Cel., n. 16, *Ibid.*, p. 242.

43. Cuthbert, *op. cit.* p. 30.

44. Lett. to the Gen. Chapt., *Omnibus*, p. 108.

45. Rule of 1221, ch. 22, *Ibid.*, p. 48.

46. 2 Cel., n. 91, *Ibid.*, p. 437.

47. Lett. to Gen. Chapt., *Omnibus*, p. 104.

48. Admon., V, *Ibid.*, p. 80.

all good and of the need to return all good and all glory to Him; 4. the vision of God as his Master and King, and his exclusive concern to please Him and to render loyal service to Him.

B. The confrontation with the Crucified

From what has been said so far, one might get the impression that Francis was contemplating a transcendent God in an abstract world of ideas. That is far from the truth. In fact he experienced the greatest intimacy with God. The two apparently opposite poles were brought together and synthesized through the Crucified Christ. The Transcendent, most High, became immanent and most intimate to him by the profound experience he had of the love of God through the discovery of the Crucified.

His first biographers speak of an extraordinary experience Francis had of the Crucified Christ. It is not relevant here to discuss whether it happened so dramatically and miraculously as 2 Cel. narrates⁴⁹, or less strikingly, while absorbed in prayer in the solitude of a cave, as Bonaventure reports.⁵⁰ In any case this experience made a tremendous impression on Francis. As Bonaventure says: "His soul melted at the sight (of the Crucified) and the memory of Christ's passion was impressed on the depths of his heart, so vividly that whenever he thought of it, he could scarcely restrain his sighs and tears, as he afterwards confessed towards the end of his life".⁵¹ We might reasonably think that God granted him a supernatural 'knowledge' of the Crucified, a knowledge of love, which is infused, illuminating and transforming⁵². We shall consider its transforming effects in Francis.

49. 2 Cel., n. 10; 1 Cel. does not mention about it.

50. Bonaventure, Leg. Maj. 1, 5, Omnibus, pp 638-639; he mentions also the episode of the Crucified speaking to Francis at San Damiano.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Mystical theologians speak of such knowledge as "substantial knowledge" it is a knowledge by direct communication by God. cf. John of the Cross, Spiritual Cant. XIII, 14; XXXVIII, 9, *The Complete works of St.-J. Cross*, tr. & ed. by Allison Peers, London, (1974), Vol. II, pp. 77, 172; cf also I. Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, p. 94.

1) Love's reply

The encounter with the Crucified inflicted a deep wound of love in the heart of the Poverello. Consequently a very intimate personal relationship was established between Francis and Christ. Jesus became 'someone for him', someone who emptied himself, who immolated himself, 'for him', and someone 'within him' claiming a total gift of self in return, demanding an expropriation of the 'I', through which the union of love is consummated.⁵³

He responded generously to the demands of this tremendous love. The rest of his life could be summarized as love's reply.⁵⁴ What he did immediately after the event at San Damiano is significant. Celano says that he at once offered the priest money for oil and a lamp, so that a suitable light might burn before the image of Christ Crucified.⁵⁵ Was it not the symbol of that light of love, lit by the hand of God in the depth of his soul at that moment, and ever since burning before the Lord of his heart? That spark, of love, placed within his heart by the God of love, and fed by the constant contemplation of the mysteries of Christ, and by acts of love, became a great fire of love. That consuming fire annihilated all other love in him.

His heart's desire and firm determination are transparent in his prayer: "May the power of Your love, O Lord, fiery and sweet as honey, wean my heart from all that is under heaven, so that I may die for love of Your Love, You who were so good as to die for love of my love".⁵⁶ It is enough to recall his zeal for martyrdom and his adventurous mission among the Saracens to realize that this was not an empty prayer. In the Rule of 1221 he writes: "The friars must always remember that they have given themselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, and so they should be prepared to expose themselves to every enemy.... for love of Him".⁵⁷ We are reminded here of the confident words of St. Paul:

53. S. J. Piat, *Con Cristo Povero e Crucifisso*, Milano, (1971) p. 104.

54. It is appropriate that a book of K. Esser on the spirituality of Francis is entitled 'Love's Reply

55. 2Cel., n. 11. *Omnibus*, p. 371.

56. "Prayer of Absorbeat", *Ibid.*, p. 161.

57. Rule of 1221, ch. 16, *Ibid.*, p. 44.

"Who can separate us from the love of Christ who died for us. As Celano states: "He chose to live no longer for himself, but for Him who died for him".⁵⁸ The insufficiency of man's love for God pained him so much that he would weep the whole night saying: "Love is not loved".⁵⁹

From this flows his longing to share in the sufferings of Christ. The first biographer tells us that during the last years of his terrible suffering, "Filled with the spirit of God, he was ready to suffer every distress of mind, and to bear every bodily torment, if only his wish might be granted, that the will of the Father in heaven might be mercifully fulfilled in him".⁶⁰ His heart was so much identified with the wounded heart of Christ, that it could be believed, as St. John of the Cross observed, that the Stigmata he received, were only an external expression of the internal wound he already had.⁶¹

His empathetic love for the crucified was extended to other human beings, and even animals, who reminded him of the sufferings of Christ. Thus he had a special affection for the lepers,⁶² whom he called 'Christian brothers'. He served them in the leper hospital, as he himself mentions in his testament. He had a sympathetic love for the lamb, which reminded him of the 'Lamb of God', who was immolated for him.⁶³ He showed love and sympathy for worms, which reminded him of the prophecy of the suffering servant of God.⁶⁴

2) His following of Christ

Love tends to conform itself with the beloved. The experience of the love of Christ, by the encounter with the

58. 1 Cel., n. 35, *Ibid.*, p. 258.

59. "Cel., n. 10, *Ibid.*, p. 370

60. 1 Cel., n. 92, p. 307.

61. St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love, Complete works*, Vol III, p. 132.

62. 1 Cel., n. 17, *Omnibus*, p. 242.

63. 1 Cel., n. 77, *Ibid.*, p. 293.

64. S. J. Piat, *Con Cristo povero*, pp 450-451.

crucified spurred him on to follow him. He wanted to imitate the Christ of the Gospel in every way. His biographer observes:

His highest intention, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose was to observe the holy Gospel in all things, and with perfect vigilance, with all zeal, with all longing of his mind and all the fervour of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁵

His own words confirm this statement: "I poor little brother Francis wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ"⁶⁶. Naturally, Christ became to Francis "the centre of all thoughts, the object of all striving, and the inspiration of all actions".⁶⁷ As a result his companions could testify that "he was always occupied with Jesus; Jesus he bore in his heart, Jesus in his mouth, Jesus in his ears, Jesus in his eyes and in all his members".⁶⁸

The prayer of Francis is to be seen in this perspective. It was a continuous 'looking on Christ', an attentive listening to Him, and an effective, conscious effort to model his life on that of Christ, by a continuous, radical, transforming 'conversion' to the person of Christ.⁶⁹ It is in this unity of purpose that he found the unity of life. That is why there was no dichotomy in him between prayer and life.

The expression "following in the footsteps of Christ" appear five times in his writings.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, it meant for Francis literally following Christ in every way. This is beyond human achievement. The Poverello was fully aware that only by divine grace could he accomplish it. Hence he prays: "Almighty

65. 1 Cel., n. 84, *Omnibus*, p. 299.

66. Last will for St. Clare, *Ibid.*, p. 76.

67. R. Celina, *St. Francis and the Fatherhood of God*, Chicago, (1973) p. 8.

68. 1 Cel., n. 115, *Omnibus*, p. 329.

69. F. S. Toppi, *Francesco, insegnaci a pregare*, palermo, (1975) p. 16.

70. O. Schucki, "Saggio sulla spiritualita di San Francesco", in *L' Italia Franc.* 42 (1967) p. 110.

and eternal, just and merciful God, grant us in our misery that we may do for your sake alone what we know You want us to do".⁷¹ He considered his whole spiritual life as a gift of God. We hear him often saying "The Lord led me", "The Lord revealed to me" etc. (Testament). This aspect of passivity spurred him on to seek always God's will, and to burst into ecstatic thanksgiving for all that he was and he had.

Briefly, the experience of the boundless love of God through the Crucified Jesus, urged him to pour out his whole being in return for love, and to conform fully to the beloved.

C. The fatherhood of God

A living faith in the fatherhood of God was another basic element of his religious experience. The realization that God's name was Father, that, thanks to rebirth in Christ, he was a child of God, was a vital and decisive factor in his relations with God. This section discusses: 1. his discovery of the Father, 2. and the consequent religious attitudes.

1) Through Christ to the Father

Francis' discovery of Christ paved the way for the discovery of the Father. As we have seen, Christ was the focus of all his thoughts. As Francis discovered the Gospel only later, it would appear that he discovered the Fatherhood of God from the encounter with the Crucified. In Christ he learned the love, goodness and mercy of the Father. His knowledge of Christ as well as his perception of the fatherhood of God grew, and was brought to perfection later through the Gospel. Through the Gospel he learned that Christ was the way to the Father, and that he who sees Christ sees the Father. This is evident from the words of his admonitions:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Nobody can come to the Father except through me. If you had recognized me, you would have recognized my Father also. And from now on you will recognize Him, since you

71. Lett. to Gen. Chapt. *Omnibus*, p. 108.

have seen Him. Philip said: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us". Jesus said to him: "Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not learned who I am? Philip, whoever sees me sees my Father too."⁷²

Francis had the deepest experience of the Father, when he made a great sacrifice⁷³ in order to opt exclusively for his heavenly Father. In order to adhere to his heavenly Father, he had to be rejected by his earthly Father. In order to possess the inheritance of the Father, he had to be disinherited his father. It was in dying to his earthly father, that he was born to his heavenly Father⁷⁴. In casting himself on the loving care of his Father, he stripped himself of everything, and renounced every human reliance. Being loosened from all earthly ties, he experienced an untold sense of freedom and immense joy. He was proud of being the son of such a Father. With a heart full of joy he exclaims: "How glorious, how holy, and how wonderful it is to have a Father in heaven".⁷⁵

2) Being the child of God

Francis' relationship to God as a son to his father, formed an integral part of his religious experience. It found expression in his interior attitude, and in his day-to-day life. One can clearly perceive three facets of his filial relationship to God: (a) trust in God's loving care, (b) seeking the Father's will, (c) glorifying the Father by bearing witness to Him.

(a) Trust in God's loving care

His conviction that God was his loving Father, gave him an unfailing spiritual strength. His child-like attitude and trust in the loving providence of God is evident in all his actions and his

72. Admon. I, *Omnibus*, p. 77.

73. 1 Cel., n. 14, *Ibid.*, p. 240

74. He did not reject his father as such; but in that context allegiance to his father would mean following the ways of the 'children of this world.'

75. Lett. to the Faithful, *Omnibus*, p. 96.

prayers. He loved to address God by the affectionate term "Father". In the 'Office of the passion', which is made up of verses from the Psalms and arranged by Francis, we find him replacing the invocations "God", "Lord" of the Psalms with "Father", "Holy Father" or "My Father".⁷⁶ His predilection for the Lord's prayer is another indication of his devotion to the Father. He not only cherished it and prayed it at all hours of the day, but longed that others too should understand and appreciate its value. Hence he made a beautiful paraphrase⁷⁷ of it in order to help his brothers to pray it more meaningfully. This prayer was substituted for the divine Office of the non-clerical brothers.

Again if we examine the selection of the verses⁷⁸ of the Psalms of the 'Office of the Passion', we can discover his filial trust in God. At the beginning of the Psalms he chooses verses expressing human misery and trials, and always ends the Psalm with verses expressing trust in God's saving power and in the loving protection of the Father. Often we find him concluding with the words: "You are my most holy Father, my King and my God, make haste to help me".⁷⁹

Knowing that his Father would provide for his needs, he did not care for the morrow. Relying on God's providence and depending on Man's good will, he was content to beg. Following the Gospel literally, he instructed his friars to take nothing with them for their journey when they went out.⁸⁰ While sending them on missions he would exhort them with the words: "Cast your care upon the Lord, and he will support you".

(b. Seeking the Fathers will

Having abandoned himself to God's loving care, Francis felt, at every step, that he was led by the unfailing hand

76. cf. "Office of the Passion", *Ibid.*, pp. 141-155.

77. "The paraphrase of the Our Father", *Ibid.*, p. 159.

78. The 'Psalms' of the "Office of the Passion" are made up of verses selected from different psalms, and arranged by Francis, adding here and there few words of his own.

79. "Office of the Passion", *Ibid.*

80. Rule of 1221, ch. 14, *Ibid.*, p. 42.

of God. The depth of this consciousness is manifested in his frequent use of the words, "The Lord led me". The Lord revealed to me" etc. (Testament). The moment he decided to follow the Lord, he gave up all his 'projects'. His only concern was to fall in line with God's designs concerning him. Hence his insatiable thirst to know and fulfil God's will. It led him to solitude; it led him to the Gospel.

Every time he discovered God's will, he rejoiced and thanked God. To mention a few examples: when, after a long search, he received enlightenment from the Gospel regarding the mode of life God wanted of him, he greatly rejoiced and thanked God⁸¹. When his Rule was approved by Pope Innocent III, "Greatly rejoicing over the gift and grace Francis gave thanks with his brothers to almighty God"⁸². When he was in a dilemma whether to choose a purely contemplative life or active ministry, he sought God's will in prayer, and asked others to pray on his behalf⁸³. After narrating this incident the Seraphic Doctor observes: He was always anxious to discover how or in what way he could serve God more perfectly according to His will. As long as he lived, this was his greatest desire, the sum total of his philosophy"⁸⁴. When he had to write a definitive Rule, he was particular that it should be in conformity with the will of God. Hence he went to the solitary hermitage of Fonte Colombo and spent days in prayer and fasting before he wrote down the Rule⁸⁵.

Francis concept of obedience should be viewed in this perspective. Obedience is for him a means of conforming to the will of God. It is an antidote to the egoism rooted in us. It means renouncing oneself in order to give oneself freely to God, following Christ, who became obedient unto death.⁸⁶

81. 1 Cel., n. 22, *Ibid.*, p. 247.

82. *Ibid.*, Nos. 32-34, pp. 254-256.

83. Leg. Maj., XII, 1, *Ibid.*, pp. 720721.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 722.

85. cf. T. Carminara, "Dove San Francesco ha composto la regola del 12237", in *Studi. Franc.* 30 (1933) pp 60-70.

86. O Schmucki, "Saggio sulla spiritualita franc..", p. 34.

A man so orientated to God as Francis was could not pray for any particular favour, except to know God's will, and for the strength to perform it. For as Fosdick rightly says: "True prayer is never an endeavour to change the divine purpose, but is always an endeavour to release it, through the one who prays, to the world".⁸⁷ To pray for something of his own liking, apart from what God willed, would mean for Francis a failure in the total commitment he made of himself to God. It would be a 'returning to the flesh-pots of Egypt'. In his writings we never find any prayer of petition, except to know God's will and for the grace to fulfil it.

The Poverello would, therefore, accept everything that came from the hands of God, whether pleasant or unpleasant, with equal joy and gratitude. He exhorts the sick friars saying: "I beg the friar who is sick to thank God for everything; he should be content to be as God wishes him to be, in sickness or in health".⁸⁸ Herein is apparent his complete docility to God's will. T. Celano reports how on Mount Verna he sought, in the Gospel God's will regarding him. And when it was revealed to him that he was to follow in the footsteps of the Crucified, he thanked God for it, and willingly accepted it.⁸⁹ The same biographer notes that "Filled with the Spirit of God, he was ready to suffer every distress of mind and to bear every bodily torment, if only his wish might be granted that the will of the Father in heaven might be granted, that the will of the Father in heaven might be mercifully fulfilled in him".⁹⁰ During the last days of his life, while suffering terribly in body, he thanked God for the pain and asked Him to increase it if it pleased Him, saying "Doing Your will is consolation enough, and more than enough for me".⁹¹ In this attitude we find perfect worship, complete surrender to God in Love.

87. Quoted by H. Schmidt, "Prayer worship and Liturgy". In *Prayer*, Ed. by Dhavamony, Rome, (1975) p. 313.

88. Rule of 1221, ch. 10, *Omnibus*, p. 40.

89. 1 Cel., nos. 92-93. *Ibid.*, pp 307-308.

90. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

91. Leg. Maj. XIV, 2, *Ibid.*, p. 738

When a person is transformed in God, and completely led by the Spirit, he cannot will anything but what God wills. This state of a person is well expressed by St. John of the Cross when he says: "I do entreat that which Thou desirest me to entreat, and that which Thou desirest not, that desire I not; nor does it pass through my mind to entreat it".⁹² This was Francis' state of mind. Herein is achieved the end of prayer, union with God

(c) Glorifying the Father by bearing witness to Him

Just as the Son of God came to the world to glorify the Father (Jn. 7:18), Francis, true child of God that he was, knew that his mission was to glorify the Father by bearing witness to Him. That is why he insisted that his friars should preach more by good example than by words. In the Rule of 1221 he wrote: "All the friars should preach by their example".⁹³ The need of witness is expressed again elsewhere in the same Rule: "They should let it be seen that they are happy in God, cheerful and courteous, as is expected of them, and be careful not to appear gloomy or depressed like hypocrites".⁹⁴ The same trend of thought is found in the Rule of 1223:

This is my advice, my counsel that when they travel about the world, they should not be quarrelsome or take part in disputes with words, or criticize others; but they should be gentle, peaceful and unassuming, courteous and humble, speaking respectfully to everyone, as is expected of them.⁹⁵

The poor man of 'One Book' understood well the mission of a Christian, namely to glorify the Father by "being perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48), or by bearing witness to God in his. This is quite in accordance with the Johannine concept of glorifying God. The glory of God is God's excellence manifested. The father glorifies the Son by communicating His

92. St. J. of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, in *Complete works*.. vol. III, tr. & ed., by Allison Peers, p. 35.

93. Rule of 1221, ch. 17, *Omnibus*, p. 44.

94. *Ibid.*, Ch. 7, p. 38.

95. Rule of 1223, ch. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 60

own excellence to him. The Son, in his turn, glorifies the Father by manifesting his name i.e. the Father's identity or excellence. By doing so he manifests his own glory as well (Jn. 17: 1). It was at his passion and death—'the hour of his glorification'—that he manifested God's glory most perfectly (Jn 7: 37; 12: 16), for, it was the peak of the revelation of the divine nature, of divine love.

What is said of the relationship of the Son and the Father is true also of the relationship of the Christian with God. Through Christ, every Christian has a share in God's life, in God's excellence. By living as Christian, by living a life worthy of the divine life in him, he manifests the divine reality which is in him; he glorifies God.⁹⁶ Francis accomplished this Christian mission in an excellent way. T. Celano says that "The glorious Father had been brought to the fulness of grace before God and shone among men of this world by his good works".⁹⁷

The important factors of Francis' religious experience have been considered here! his perception of God's holiness, and goodness, his vision of God as his Master and King, his experience of God's love through Christ, and finally, his understanding of God as Father. All these contributed to establishing a vital relationship with God, so that his whole life was totally orientated to God.

Shantinikethan,
Kulamavu.

Vincent Kurusummootil

96. cf. T. Barrosse, "Faith and Love in St. John", in *Theol. Stud.*, (1957) pp. 545-552.

97. 1 Cel., n. 103, *Omnibus*, p. 317.

BULLETIN

The Petersham Meeting

Spirituality for a World Culture

It is difficult at this close range to judge the full significance of the Petersham Meeting. But there are some indications that it may reach far beyond that which its organizers had conceived.

One of these is the extensive press coverage it received—primarily in the Catholic papers, but also in secular ones, such as the *Washington Post*. There were front page stories with such banners as “Petersham, a global village, site of monastic symposium on East-West spiritual unity”, and “Monks of East meet West”. The many accompanying photographs showed a very unusual gathering of men and women, obviously of many races and nations, some attired in the traditional garbs of their respective orders, others in the international nondescript gear of today’s aging youth or the ubiquitous Western business suit.

More prophetic of the meeting’s significance perhaps was the presence of a high-ranking United Nations’ official, Dr. Robert Muller, Director of Interagency Affairs in the office of the Secretary General. Dr. Ewert Cousins spoke of this very cosmopolitan German as “the best informed man in the world about the state of the world today”, for across his desk passes everything that comes to the U. N. And he seems to have been able to absorb it all and incorporate it into a Teilhardian vision. Cousins, himself, who had coordinated the World Summit Meeting of Religions that marked the United Nations’ thirtieth anniversary and is one of the few Americans accredited to the Vatican’s Secretariat for non-Christians, had left the Concilium meeting to come to Petersham. From his point of view he highlighted the significance of the meeting in saying that at that gathering of Christendom’s leading thinkers (including such men as Lonergan, Curran, Küng, Metz, Greeley) two dimensions were missing: bringing their thought in touch with the deep roots of the spirit

and seeing all in the context of a rapidly evolving global culture, and these were the dimensions that he found giving depth and vibrancy to all the thinking at Petersham.

The springs from which the Petersham event flowed go back a bit and are touched by that prophetic monk who in some very real sense was a living presence exercising significant influence at the meeting: Thomas Merton. It was at the Bangkok Conference of Asiatic Monastics (December, 1968), which achieved international notoriety because of the sudden and much lamented death of Merton, that the Holy See issued its most insistent demand that Christian monastic settlements in the East must open to the surrounding cultures and imbibe the vital elements of their rich spiritual heritages. All the superiors present expressed a deep desire to do this, but when the follow-up meeting convened at Bangalore (1973) it was found that very little had actually been accomplished in this direction in the intervening years. Most of the monastic foundations were too small and struggling too hard with basic needs to be able to free really competent personnel for contacts, study and experience and the education (the etymological meaning of that word is operative here: to lead 'orth-from the bonds of a rather defensive and prejudicial outlook) of their brothers and sisters. As a result the eyes of Church leadership turned to the West. Here the monasteries are larger, more affluent, and more and more monks and nuns, with the freedom that comes from being more secure and at home, are opening to the values of the Eastern traditions.

They have not had to go to Asia to come into contact with these traditions. Spiritual Masters from the East, some of the best, have been finding their way West. Excellent contacts can be made right in the West. In time, it is hoped, the West will be able to reach out and lend knowledgeable personnel and expertise to their brothers and sisters in Asia. In 1974, Cardinal Pignedoli, head of the Secretariat for non-Christians, issued a call in a letter to the Abbot Primate of the Benedictines, who in turn entrusted the matter to the A. I. M. (Aide Intermonastique) Secretariat in Paris. It was under the sponsorship of this Secretariat that the Petersham Meeting was convened.

The meeting was designed to be a rather small planning session to map out a course to be taken and to establish whatever

structures might seem necessary or useful to move things along that course. There was an equal number of monks and nuns. Added to these were about ten young people who had made their pilgrimage to the East and were now returning, like so many today, seeking to integrate some of the spiritual riches they found there with a fuller possession of their own culture and roots. These were not all so young, actually, the best known among them being the former Harvard Professor, Ram Dass. Speaking out of their own existential experience and present concern, they grounded the discussions of the monastics and kept them very much in touch with solid earth and living reality. In addition, there were a dozen or so "experts", like Dr. Muller and Dr. Cousins, who confronted the group with challenging visions and demanding needs.

The Secretariat for non-Christians in issuing its call was not primarily concerned with the revitalization and indigenization of monasticism. This is an essential step in the process. But what the Secretariat is concerned with primarily is that Christian monasticism play that very significant role that only it can play in the outreach of the Church to religious that are so rooted in a monastic spirituality. But the Petersham meeting went far beyond this, to see the challenge to monasticism and to the Church today to lie not in bridging the gaps between East and West but rather as one with the monastics of the East and all persons who are perceptive of and responsive to the monk in themselves, to move forward in the creation of the spiritual base that is essential to the rapidly evolving world culture.

Actually there were three foci at the meeting and it was the synthesis of these three that made the event so rich and enriching for each of the participants.

The first focus and the most significant, and perhaps the least expected on the part of many of those who gathered for the meeting, was the global vision. It was ably introduced early in the meeting by the very learned and provocative young Canadian abbot, Dom Armand Veilleux (who is presently negotiating with Castro to establish a contemplative monastic community in Cuba), and strongly forwarded by the outspoken Benedictine activist, Fr. Anthony Mullaney of Packard Manse. But it was undoubtedly Dr. Muller who brought the dimension to its full

maturity. With a masterful command of his material and an impressive ability to synthesize, he gave a sweeping vista of the evolution of human society over the past thirty years. Man has first to be able to live and to live humanly – to have food and shelter and education – before he can be free to attend to his spiritual heritage. And so the emphasis at the U. N. has been on the *political* and *economic* level, creating a climate of peace and material well being. In large measure a scientific outlook has prevailed. Yet the great leadership – one has to think only of Dag Hammarskjöld and U Thant – has consistently had an uplifting spiritual vision. Today, more and more, other levels of concern are emerging: the *moral* and the *spiritual*. All four are essential to the realization of a new true world culture. Every great culture has had its monastic dimension which has usually been incarnated and expressed with prophetic challenge by actual monastic communities. The emerging global culture very much needs to realize this dimension and needs the presence of monks and nuns in its evolution to insure that this is not forgotten but is positively fostered.

The second focus was the more obvious one: what the Christian West stands to gain from an openness and receptivity to the values of the East. One of the co-chairmen of the meeting, Abbot Cornelius Tholens, who returned from three years in India last year to become the official liaison between the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands and the non-Christian religions, was the leading spokesman for this, strongly seconded by the returning pilgrims-to-the-East.

These gave enthusiastic witness to the values they found in the East, values they are strongly convinced can enrich any Christian life: simple effective methods for entering into deep meditation, for getting more in touch with self, or the illusions of self, and with all reality, for bringing the whole person into worship – the body through postures, attention to breath, symbolic actions, and the senses and imagination through many and varied rituals – so that prayer is not just a raising of the mind and heart to God; the openness and simplicity of ashram and temple life instead of the formality of our structured and defined religious institutions; the ready availability, if not of great spiritual masters – for these are few in number – at least of teachers,

disciples of the great ones who are ready to pass on what they have learned.

Harvey Cox in a recent article (*Psychology Today*, July 1977) asks the question: "Why young Americans are buying Oriental Religions: What are they looking for, the millions who have been touched by this Neo-Oriental Religious Revival?" and summarizes his findings in four elements: fraternity, authority, experience, and simplicity. These are the elements that the East offers in its living contemporary expression of ancient ascetic and mystic traditions. But one cannot readily incorporate or incarnate these treasures brought from afar into the existing Western Christian structures. I think Abbot Tholens's own life is an example of this. Returning from three years in India, he could not take up life again in the monastery he had founded and ruled for twenty-five years, but had to create for himself a sort of ashram in order to have the freedom and flexibility to continue the yogic rhythm he had found in Shantivanam. Dom Jean Marie Dechanet is another example. Through his study of William of Saint Thierry, a twelfth century Cistercian, he was opened to the values of yoga. At first he practised it in his abbey at Bruges, but soon found it more favorable to go to a small primitive foundation in Africa. In the end he received leave of his abbot to establish a Christian-yoga retreat in the Alps. It is certainly good to see these and many other new monastic or spiritual centers bringing the values of the East, arising in the body of Western Christendom. But these values coming from the East should challenge us to ask of our own Western tradition if it has not something of the same to offer us. It is here that the significance of the third focus begins to emerge.

Abbot Thomas Keating of Spencer Abbey and Father Mayeul de Dreuille of La Pierre-que-vive and others insisted strongly on the importance of the West's recovering and reestablishing its own contemplative tradition. In the context of the Petersham meeting this was seen from two optics. It may be seen as a response to the challenge from the East. This seems to have been the experience of Abbot Thomas and his community. Contact with yoga, zen and TM, seeing the many benefits that were being derived from these practices, the facility they offered the young, and not so young, to enter into a deeper life, the monks were encouraged to go deeper into their own contemplative heri-

tage and, also, to seek more simple and practical ways of sharing these, which they have found in part in the Centering Prayer movement. But for others, as Abbot Thomas was quick to point out, the route would be different. Many in the West will never be able to open to the perception of the values of the meditative and mystical traditions of the East until they first go deeply into their own tradition.

This seems to be more the route followed by Thomas Merton. In spite of his very cosmopolitan background, his early vision as a Cistercian was very circumscribed. But as he grew in contemplative depth, he opened out to become the great seer of our times. I have spoken to some of the Eastern masters who met Father on his last journey. They have said no one from the West has understood them so well. Yet scholars examining the Eastern writings of Merton find his knowledge was not that extensive. Rather, he, from the depths of his Cistercian experience – a typical Western Christian mysticism – met these masters in the depths of their experience, and they knew they were being understood.

Whether it is in response to the awakening that comes from the challenge of an East that has so abundantly overflowed into the West – who can count the ashrams, the zendos, the centers for yoga, sufism, Insight Meditation, etc. that dot the United States today – or as a response to the call from within our own fold to renew, to return to our sources, our life-giving traditions, the signs of the times call for the recovery of the rich contemplative tradition of Western Christendom.

It was the confluence of these three foci: the call to the West to recover her own contemplative depth, and the meeting of this with the great spiritual currents of the East, not now just to dialogue or be mutually enriched, but to form the spiritual basis for a new global culture, that brought the Petersham Meeting to a high point of vision, hope and sense of mission.

There have been other significant spiritual happenings of this nature in recent years: The Word-out-of-Silence Symposium at Mount Savior and the Summit Meeting of World Religions at the U. N. But as Swami Satchidananda said to me at Petersham: "What has become of them?" It was here that Petersham hoped

to be decidedly different – not to be just an event, but a beginning. Practical structures and programs on many levels were initiated.

A Permanent Working Group: An executive board of Benedictine and Cistercian monks and nuns with competent lay advisers will guide a group of executive officers who will live together, forming community, hosting retreats and conferences, serving as a clearing house for information and communication providing a speakers' bureau and coordinating collaboration with such groups as the Association of Contemplative Sisters, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the various monastic groups, all to the end of sharing and bringing into reality the vision of Petersham. This group will seek NGO (non-governmental organization) status at the United Nations.

An Academic Committee: In collaboration with the Center for Contemplative Studies, the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, the Riverdale Centre for Religious Research and other such groups, this Committee will seek to foster East-West studies that will be in touch with the spiritual heritages of each. Many colleges and universities already have courses in Eastern mysticism but relatively few have any on Western mysticism – though their number is significantly increasing, thanks to the efforts of Prof. John R. Sommerfeldt and the Center for Contemplative Studies. The Committee will also seek, through individual contacts with significant persons and through seminars and dialogues with monastics, to put Christian theologians more in touch with the spiritual depths of their subjects, especially as it is lived out in our contemplative tradition, and to open them out to a more pervasive and informing global awareness.

Center for Christian Meditation: The meeting was strongly convinced of the importance of working with presently existing institutions. Every effort will be made to encourage monasteries to establish programs to teach Christian meditation, to welcome long-term guests and temporary vocations and to develop exchange programs with Eastern monasteries. But there is seen the need of developing new centers with something of the flexibility of the ashram where perhaps the traditions of East and West can come into confluence in the teaching of meditation practice; a

place where lay persons can easily come for longer or shorter periods to share monastic experience as a basis for living a fuller Christian life in the world. Monasteries will be encouraged to be supportive of such centers even to the extent of providing land, financial support and experienced teachers.

The programs are ambitious. Undoubtedly they will take time to unfold - although a number of projects are already coming together. But the vision is great and awesome - and vitally important for the future of the Church and mankind. If East and West cannot meet in depth, at that spiritual level where they are most truly themselves, they can only clash and crash as they squabble over a limited materiality. If the rapidly emerging world culture has not a spiritual base that sanctions its ethic and gives it a transcendent vision, it can only lead to the darkest despair of a self-destroying race. We must begin now, in every tradition, in every culture, in every faith and religion, to affirm together that Truth is One, that we *are* all brothers and sisters, that we share a common destiny that is beyond us, yet already alive in us, so we have a hope and a reason to be one people. This is the meaning and significance, as I see it, of the Petersham Meeting.

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M. Basil Pennington

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